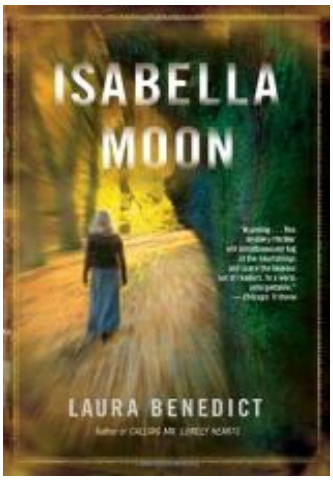
Isabella Moon

by Laura Benedict



About the Book

"**Isabella Moon** is a book of secrets and dark miracles. Laura Benedict writes with tender power and understanding, filling the pages with characters whose mysteries and longings will matter to every reader."
? Luanne Rice, author of **The Edge of Winter**

Sometimes the past comes looking for you?

Two years ago, in idyllic Carystown, Kentucky, nine-year-old Isabella Moon disappeared on her way home from school. Is it just coincidence that Kate Russell, a young woman with no discernible past, arrived in town just months before Isabella?s disappearance? When Kate walks into Sheriff Bill Delaney?s office to tell him that Isabella?s ghost has led her to the child?s hidden grave, he immediately views her as a suspect. Mystery follows mystery as a local athlete drops dead, inexplicably, on the basketball court, and someone close to Kate is viciously murdered.

Quiet Carystown was to be Kate?s salvation, and she?s settled into a comfortable job, a charming cottage, and a blissful romance. But having lied to her boyfriend, Caleb, for so long about the terrors of her past life, she finds she can?t trust him to understand the terror that Isabella Moon has now brought. And Kate?s best friend, Francie, is too wrapped up in her own troubles --? particularly a secret affair with a man she at once loves and despises ?-- to give Kate the help she needs. Utterly alone, Kate is torn between finding justice for the dead child and keeping away old ghosts of her own.

The unsolved disappearance of Isabella Moon has been the biggest disappointment of Sheriff Delaney?s career. But he senses that Kate is trouble. As he investigates her impossible claims, he also uncovers a series of unsettling truths about Carystown itself. Behind his hometown?s genteel façade is a morass of lies and murder, drugs and destruction. And Carystown?s residents are about to discover that even though the past is buried, it can rise again --- with a vengeance.

Dark and suspenseful, tense and eerie, tinged with the supernatural, **Isabella Moon** is an engrossing, beautifully written

debut novel, a breathtaking and artful story of the dark mysteries that can lurk in the most bucolic of places --- and the ghost of a little girl who watches as evil rises unstoppably to the surface.

Discussion Guide

1. Why does Isabella choose Kate as the target for her apparitions? Is it conscious on Isabella?s part, or is the apparition there for everyone, but only visible to Kate? Who else might Isabella have tried to communicate with?

2. Victims of abuse often re-create the patterns of abusive relationships with new partners, even after they break ties with their primary abusers. Does Kate do this with Caleb? If so, how? What parallels do you see between Kate?s relationship with Caleb and Mary-Katie?s with Miles? What are the major differences?

3. At what point does Sheriff Delaney realize or decide that Kate is telling the truth? How does the attraction he feels for her interfere with his ability to take Kate seriously?

4. Isabella Moon is about secrets kept and secrets revealed. What big secrets remain kept at the end of the book? Will they stay secret, or will they too inevitably be revealed in time?

5. One of the secrets that remains at the end of the book is the true nature of the relationship between Francie and Paxton. What do they really represent to each other? How does this change over the course of the book?

6. Several characters in **Isabella Moon** have experiences that blur the lines between the perceived and the real, between the natural and the supernatural. One of these experiences is what happens to Lillian at the moment of her death; what is this? Does her killer experience what she sees and feels?

7. At what point did you understand the relationship between Kate and Mary-Katie? If Kate had not seen Isabella, would she have been able to live a ?normal? new life in Carystown? Why or why not?

8. Although one particular person kills Isabella, and one particular person kills Lillian, responsibility for those deaths ripples throughout Carystown. Who else bears responsibility for these deaths, and why?

9. At the end of the book, is justice served? If not, what should have happened? Why does Bill Delaney retire? Does Janet really change? Is redemption possible without retribution, or are some punishments more appropriate than legal ones?

10. And last but not least, where does Kate go?

Author Bio

Laura Benedict is the Edgar- and ITW Thriller Award- nominated author of seven novels of suspense, including her latest, THE STRANGER INSIDE. On the lighter side of mystery, Laura wrote SMALL TOWN TROUBLE, a cozy

crime novel, for the *Familiar Legacy* series. Her *Bliss House* gothic trilogy includes THE ABANDONED HEART, CHARLOTTE'S STORY (*Booklist* starred review) and BLISS HOUSE. Her short fiction has appeared in *Ellery Queen?s Mystery Magazine,* and in numerous anthologies like THRILLERS: 100 Must-Reads, THE LINEUP: 20 Provocative Women Writers, and ST. LOUIS NOIR. A native of Cincinnati, she lives in Southern Illinois with her family.

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