

Discover my latest summer book pick, the inspiration behind my new novel, and refreshing twists on Ina Garten's summer pasta recipe.

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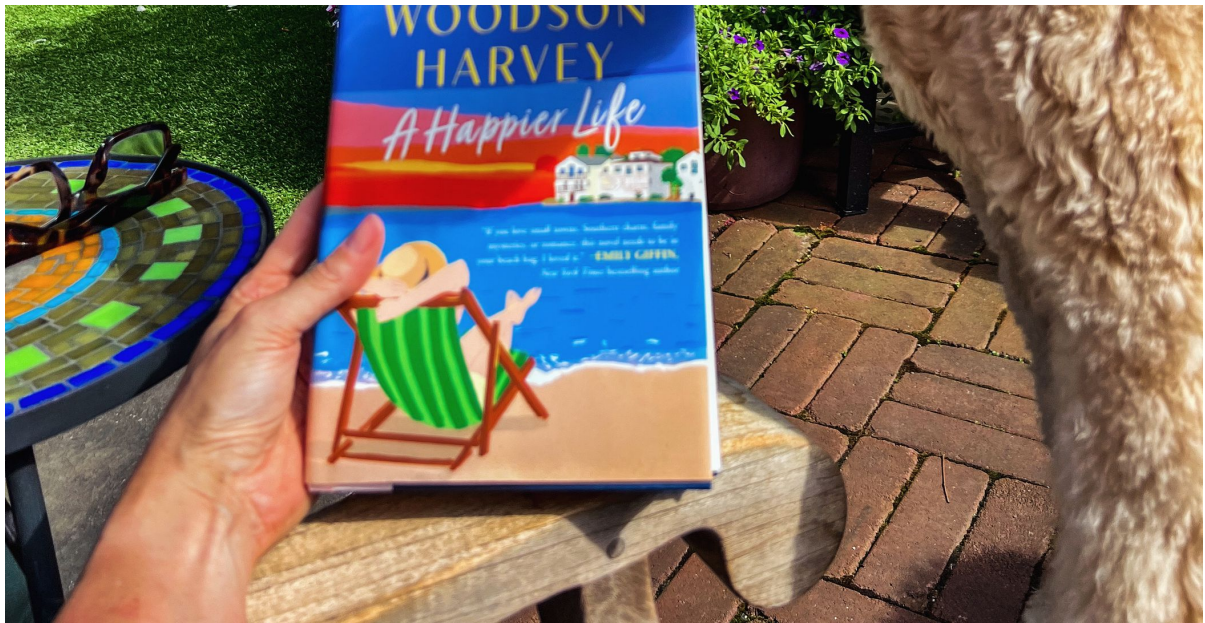
Hello there 😊

Welcome to July's newsletter! I'm excited to share what's been keeping me busy lately.

What I'm Reading

A Happier Life by Kristy Woodson Harvey







As the warmth of summer settles in, I reach for light, easy reads to accompany lazy days by the pool or relaxing evenings on my patio. I don't know about you, but there are a handful of authors whose summer releases I eagerly anticipate each year, and Kristy Woodson Harvey is right at the top of that list.

I was first introduced to Harvey's writing by a dear friend who recommended her Peach Bluff series, which is in development for television for NBC. I devoured those books, quickly followed by *Feels Like Falling*, and I've been hooked ever since. While those earlier works remain my favorites, I was thrilled to dive into her latest summer release, *A Happier Life*.

What I love most about Harvey's books is how relatable her characters are. She has a knack for exploring themes of family, friendship, love, and personal growth that resonate with me. And let's not forget those charming Southern small-town settings she crafts - they make her stories even more delightful!

A Happier Life presents an intriguing premise: Imagine walking into your grandparents' home, untouched since the day they died in 1976, realizing you know almost nothing about them or that their home is still owned by your family. The story unfolds from two perspectives - the grandmother in 1976 and the modern-day granddaughter trying to piece together her family history.

I found *A Happier Life* to be a fun and engaging read, perfect for a day at the pool, the beach, or lounging in a chair on the patio. It combines a touch of mystery, a dash of romance, and plenty of that Southern charm we've come to expect from Harvey's writing.

If you're looking for an easy summer beach/poolside read, I recommend picking up a copy of *A Happier Life*. It's the kind of book that's fun to get lost in, yet leaves you with a warm, satisfied feeling when you're done.

I'd love to hear your thoughts if you decide to give *A Happier Life* a try. And for those of you who've already explored Kristy Woodson Harvey's work, which of her books have you enjoyed most? Whether you're a longtime fan or new to her writing, feel free to share your favorites or first impressions in the comments below. Let's swap recommendations and keep our summer reading lists growing!

What I'm Writing

The Inspiration Behind My Latest Novel



When I sat down to write my latest novel, *Summer in the Moon Garden*, I never imagined the journey it would take me on—both creatively and emotionally. The seed of this story was planted during a bittersweet reunion with my high school friends. We were a tight-knit group of five, brought together again under the shadow of devastating news: one of us had been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

During one of our weekends together, reminiscing about old times and creating new memories, my friends suggested I write a book about our group. We had always been a mischievous bunch, with more stories to share than time allowed. It seemed like the perfect foundation for a novel.

I already had a character in mind—Kat—but her story wasn't fully formed. Inspired by our reunion, I had Kat return to her hometown after a long absence, only to discover that one of her childhood best friends was dying of cancer. It felt like a powerful premise, mirroring our own painful reality.

However, as I delved deeper into the writing process, I found myself at an emotional crossroads. Halfway through the draft, I realized the story I was telling was overwhelmingly sad. It didn't feel right. The friend we were losing had always been the life of the party, brimming with more vitality than any of us. Her spirit seemed at odds with the somber tale I was writing.

That's when it hit me—why not use the power of fiction to tell the story I wished were true? I asked myself, "What's the opposite of dying from cancer?" The answer came instantly: winning the lottery. With renewed purpose, I scrapped my initial draft and started over.

In this reimagined version, I infused various characters with aspects of my friends' personalities. But it was the character of Jess, the lottery winner, who became the heart of the novel. Jess embodies the spirit of my dear friend, who is no longer with us. Her philosophy

of loving those around you, having fun, teaching others to do the same, and ultimately just doing whatever makes you happy, became the driving force of the narrative.

Through Jess, I could celebrate my friend's life rather than mourn her loss. The novel became a tribute to her infectious joy and the profound impact she had on all of us. It's a story of second chances, seizing life's opportunities, and the enduring power of friendship.

Writing this book was a healing process for me. It allowed me to explore the 'what ifs' and create a world where our friend's vibrant spirit lives on. While reality may not always give us the endings we hope for, fiction provides a canvas where we can paint our deepest wishes and brightest hopes.

My latest novel is more than just a story—it's a celebration of life, friendship, and the indelible mark we leave on each other's hearts. It's a reminder that even in the face of loss, the memories we create and the love we share can continue to inspire and bring joy long after we're gone.

What I'm Cooking

Summer's endless variations on Ina Garten's Summer Pasta.





Ina Garten's Summer Pasta recipe has been my go-to dish this season. As with most recipes, I can't help but tweak and experiment. Below Ina's recipe are four delicious variations I've concocted.

Ina Garten's Summer Pasta

Servings: 4-6

Ingredients:

- 1 pound pasta (Ina uses angel hair)
- 4 pints cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1/2 cup good olive oil
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic (3 cloves)
- 18 large basil leaves, julienned
- 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 cups freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- Extra basil leaves for garnish

Instructions:

1. **Marinate the Tomatoes:** In a large bowl, combine the cherry tomatoes, olive oil, garlic, basil, red pepper flakes, 2 teaspoons of salt, and 1 teaspoon of black pepper. Stir together and let the mixture sit at room temperature for about 4 hours. This allows the flavors to meld together beautifully.
2. **Cook the Pasta:** When ready to serve, bring a large pot of water with a generous amount of salt to a boil. Add the pasta and cook according to the package directions until al dente. Drain the pasta well.
3. **Combine:** Add the hot pasta to the bowl with the marinated tomatoes. Toss everything together, making sure the pasta is well coated with the tomato mixture. The heat from the pasta will gently warm the tomatoes and release their juices.

4. **Add Cheese:** Add the grated Parmesan cheese to the pasta and toss again until everything is well combined. Taste and adjust seasoning with more salt and pepper if needed.
5. **Garnish and Serve:** Serve the pasta immediately, garnished with extra basil leaves. Enjoy your refreshing and flavorful summer pasta!

Variations:

1. Chilled Caprese Pasta Salad

Swap in cooked bowtie pasta (though any shape works) and rinse it in cold water before tossing it in the tomato mixture along with tiny fresh mozzarella balls for a refreshing twist.

2. Tomato Burrata Salad (photo above)

Ditch the pasta entirely and pair the marinated tomatoes with peppery arugula, creamy burrata, and salty prosciutto for a light and indulgent meal.

3. Bruschetta-Style Grilled Sourdough

Grill thick slices of sourdough and top them with the marinated tomato mixture for a delicious appetizer.

4. Gourmet Pizza Upgrade

Breathe new life into a frozen pizza by spreading leftover marinated tomatoes on top before baking.

This recipe is perfect for a hot summer day, as it features fresh, juicy tomatoes and a touch of basil, making it both light and satisfying. Let me know if you try the recipe!

Happy eating and reading!

Best wishes ✨

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