



# Cedar Valley

*Holly Throsby*

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## **Cedar Valley** Holly Throsby

'He strolled down Valley Road, only briefly, past the hairdresser and a small cafe. A warm wind stirred, carrying with it the faint smell of pies and horses, and the man paused for just a moment before he sat down. Benny Miller would have driven right past him in her station wagon on that bright and brimming day.'

On the first day of summer in 1993, two strangers arrive in the town of Cedar Valley.

One is a calm looking man in a brown suit. He makes his way down the main street and walks directly to Cedar Valley Curios & Oldwares, sitting down on the footpath, where he leans silently against the big glass window for hours.

The other is 21-year-old Benny Miller. Fresh out of university, Benny has come to Cedar Valley in search of information about her mother, Vivian, who has recently died. Vivian's mysterious old friend, Odette Fisher, has offered Benny her modest pale green cottage for as long as she wants it.

Is there any connection between the man on the pavement and Benny's quest to learn more about her mother? Holly Throsby is the perfect guide as Cedar Valley and its inhabitants slowly reveal their secrets.

## **Cedar Valley Details**

Date : Published September 26th 2018 by Allen & Unwin

ISBN : 9781760630560

Author : Holly Throsby

Format : Paperback 391 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction

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## From Reader Review Cedar Valley for online ebook

### Tom Evans says

A fresh and highly readable novel set in the confines of a rural NSW town. Throsby has created an intriguing and engaging spin on the typical 'murder in a small town' story that was both enjoyable and original.

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### Brenda says

Benny Miller was surprised at how much at home she felt in Cedar Valley, even as she arrived. Although she had never been there before, she felt welcomed. A friend of her recently deceased mother, Odette Fisher, had offered Benny the use of her cottage – the one her mother Vivian had lived in for a while – and Benny was looking forward to meeting Odette and getting to know the town, as well as details about her mother. Benny had left her father, the friends she had in the share house, and Sydney on this quest – it was 1993 and she felt a youthful exuberance.

Cora Franks was the owner of Cedar Valley Curios & Oldwares and although she noticed the well-dressed man sitting outside, leaning against her shop window, she was busy and soon forgot him. It also turned out that Cora was Benny's next door neighbour and had known Benny's mother. Both Benny and the stranger arrived in Cedar Valley on the same day, but when Benny saw him, she was sure she didn't know him...

*Cedar Valley* is my first by Aussie author Holly Throsby and I found it an intriguing read, with two parallel mysteries that didn't seem to be completely resolved. I found myself laughing aloud on occasion; enjoyed Benny's character as she tried to learn more about her elusive mother. A good read until the last page – *Cedar Valley* finished with a very abrupt and unsatisfying ending. When I looked to the next page to continue reading and saw "Acknowledgements" I was astounded!

With thanks to Allen & Unwin for my uncorrected proof ARC to read in exchange for an honest review.

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### the.four.readers says

This delightful portrait of life in a small country town mixes Australia-in-the-90s-nostalgia with a dose of family intrigue and a very mysterious death to create a heartwarming and thoroughly enjoyable read. Holly Throsby is a huge talent. Her novels have won many awards and she's also a singer/songwriter - I loved *Under the Town* and her collaboration with Sarah Blasko and Sally Seltmann (*Seeker Lover Keeper*) is perfection.

How good is Holly Throsby? ???

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### Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says

\*<https://mrsbbookreviews.wordpress.com>

Inspired by one of Australia's most profound and unsolved case mysteries, 'The Somerton Man', comes Cedar Valley, the second novel from musician turned writer Holly Throsby. Cedar Valley is an authentic and weaving small town Australian mystery. With secrets, family connections and a vibrant community at the very core of this novel, Cedar Valley is a profound tribute to Australia's regional centres.

Opening on the pivotal first day of the summer season in the year 1993, Cedar Valley sees two newcomers arrive in this small town on the same day. Benny is one of these freshly arrived strangers. Benny is a university student, twenty one years old and is desperate to find out more information on her recently deceased mother, Vivian. Helping Benny uncover the secrets of her lineage is Odette, a local resident of Cedar Valley and an old friend of Benny's mother. An old cottage awaits Benny in the town of Cedar Valley, as she attempts to uncover her mother's past. By coincidence, another newcomer arrives in Cedar Valley. This man is impeccably dressed and is drawn to a local antique shop. It is quite shocking for the townspeople of Cedar Valley when the unknown man dies on the pavement of the place he has been sitting at for hours on end. Cedar Valley tries to make sense of these two different mysteries simultaneously, while drawing on the possible connection between these two strangers. Cedar Valley is a meandering tale, with expert host Holly Throsby in the control centre.

With the tagline 'Strange things happen in small towns' I knew that I was going to enjoy Cedar Valley, the second novel by Holly Throsby. Cedar Valley is also second novel I have read by this author. I read and enjoyed Goodwood, Throsby's debut novel when it released last year. Cedar Valley shows us how Throsby has continued to thrive as a small town Australian fiction writer. This second novel is even richer than her first, demonstrating just how well versed Throsby is in encapsulating regional Australia.

Small town rural fiction doused with plenty of mystery and intrigue are the best words I can use to describe Cedar Valley. If you had the pleasure of reading Goodwood, Throsby's first novel, you are going to really appreciate this second offering. Throsby has refined her craft and the end result is a book that captures the sense of community, togetherness, vibe and a natural curiosity of small town Australia. This is Throsby's passion and clearly she has a great deal of affection for accurately representing small town Australia. This is an authentic tale, filled with characters that we know we would easily bump in to down the street, or share a drink with at the local pub. Connected to this is the wonderful sense of nostalgia that I gained from the time period this novel is set, the early 1990s. Throsby's depiction of this time in our not too distant past was spot on.

I liked the way in which Cedar Valley morphed into a path of self discovery for the lead of the story, Benny. A newcomer to Cedar Valley, following the death of her mother, with only scant clues to her mother's background, Benny becomes covered in the fabric of this colourful community. It is a great journey to follow, full of interesting clues, some dead ends and of course startling discoveries. Connected to this is how the community comes to embrace Benny along with how Benny comes to lean on the people of Cedar Valley. It is an endearing touch and I appreciated this aspect of the book very much.

The central mystery of the novel, the baffling case of the stranger who comes to Cedar Valley and unexpectedly dies, is one of the prime reasons why I was enthralled by this book all the way through. When I discovered this segment of the story was loosely based on the cold case that has baffled Australia's greatest sleuths for decades, I found it quite remarkable. It sparked something in me, an innate need to find out more about the Somerton man case. Throsby handles this aspect of her novel with plenty of poise and a steady guiding hand. Many may pick up that this is a highly character orientated and slow burn style mystery novel, but it is well worth investigating. The end comes rolling past you with a sense of satisfaction.

Sometimes it is hard to imagine how a seemingly inconsequential death of an unknown person can have such

as ripple effect on a small town. Cedar Valley shows the care, concern, support, intrigue and effective nature of communities, such as the endearing one represented on the pages of this novel. Throsby has extended herself and has provided readers with another profound small town Australian mystery novel.

\*Thanks extended to Allen & Unwin for providing a free copy of this book for review purposes.

Cedar Valley is book #133 of the Australian Women Writers Challenge

\*Book 'T' of the a-z author challenge 2018

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### **Jessica Lourigan says**

Highly recommended by a friend, I had very high expectations of this book and I wasn't disappointed. Throsby has a simple way of telling a tale that draws you to the characters and the town. So many times I wished I could stroll down the Main Street in town or enjoy a drink at the local with Tom and Odette. I think I was expecting some literary poetic genius that wasn't there. But still I wasn't disappointed. It's very simple in the telling but still very touching. I was intrigued by the true story of the Somerset Man and look forward to reading more by this author. On a side note it was exciting to see the local florist in Cedar Valley shared my surname ?

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### **Halena says**

I like the setting of this book. It was a realistic version of an Australian country town. The characters were believable and I thought Odette was wonderful. Unfortunately I felt that Benny was not portrayed in enough detail. I'm being fussy but this is an enjoyable summer read.

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### **Saturday's Child says**

It was with great anticipation that I began reading Holly Throsby's latest novel because I was really entertained by her debut novel Goodwood. This one is once again set in a small country town and the style of Holly's writing allows me to picture both the town and the characters that live there. She captures life in a small town in such a realistic way. I was not disappointed with this novel as it had me turning pages and I loved the way she used an old unsolved mystery to weave some fact into her fiction. My only criticism was the ending which I felt was a just a bit abrupt.

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### **Brooke - One Woman's Brief Book Reviews says**

\*[www.onewomansbbr.wordpress.com](http://www.onewomansbbr.wordpress.com)

\*[www.facebook.com/onewomansbbr](http://www.facebook.com/onewomansbbr)

Cedar Valley by Holly Throsby. (2018).

On December 1st 1993, two strangers arrive in Cedar Valley. One is a calm looking man who sits down on the footpath silently for hours. The other is 21 year old Benny who has made contact with her recently deceased mother's friend Odette to learn more about her mum. Is there any connection between the man and Benny's search for information on her mum?

I loved this book. It's set in a small town, and it's written how I imagine living in a small town would be like (sorry to any small town people who find it stereotypical haha). There are two main storylines involved. One is around Benny, a young woman who has moved to this town to find information on her recently deceased mother; I really felt for Benny on her journey as she discovers things about her mother who she barely knew, while building connections with people who knew her mum years ago. The second storyline is around an unknown man who arrived on the same day as Benny, sat down on the footpath and died - very similar to the real life case of the Somerton Man/Tamam Shud case (seriously fascinating if you are into true crime mysteries!) which is referenced throughout this book. I smashed this book in one day because I found it so interesting. The characters all seemed realistic and believable, and the way the storylines intertwine is very clever. Would be happy to recommend this excellent book.

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### **Molokov says**

Holly Throsby's second novel Cedar Valley follows a similar formula to the first - it's a mystery set in a small town, but that's about the only similarity. This book intertwines the mysteries surrounding both the dead man in Valley Road and Benny Miller's mother and although it's a slow unravel - at the pace of a country town, in fact - it's still so easily readable to keep you engrossed to the very last page. There's such an easy-going way that the characters of the town are introduced and explored, with plenty of depth to the characters, you could easily imagine them as the ensemble cast of something like "A Country Practice" but as a slow-paced crime investigation show.

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### **Leah says**

It was such a good story but the ending was so disappointing!

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### **Krystal says**

**SWEET JEEZUZ I NEED A MINUTE HERE.**

I just ... what?

*I'm so confused.*

\*\*\*

*\*2 hours later\**

Ok.

So.

### **This was a fantastic book.**

Me and Australian small towns don't really get along. Both in life and in the literary world. I hate the small-town vibe where everyone knows everyone and gossips about everyone else's business. I hate the lack of drive, how everyone is just settled into their dull routines and passes every day the same. I've got a Took spirit, like Bilbo. I want adventure and mountains and hey if there's dragons I'm not gonna complain.

(I should also mention that, if you are from a small town, I realise my opinions of you and your lifestyle are completely unfair, stereotyped and likely untrue. Please forgive me.)

When it comes to Australian books set in small towns, they have to be pretty special. They have to give me something *new and different*.

You know what this book gave me?

An appreciation for the simplicity of life in a small town.

How the heck did that happen??!

Maybe it had something to do with the way Benny became a part of the town so easily? Maybe it was to do with how comforting she found it, and how naturally she got along with everyone. I'll admit it - I was envious. She made it seem like such a wonderful adventure, to go and live among these people and become one of them.

There are also some brilliant, 'Australia in the 90s' references which I really enjoyed. Who doesn't love a side of nostalgia with their small-town story? But it never went overboard; never overindulged in describing things or included things that didn't need to be included. Everything had its place. It not only held my interest but had me picturing the town so vividly. This book has such a wonderful community vibe and for the duration of reading I really felt like I was a part of it.

There's a really neat parallel between Benny settling in, and the mystery of the man outside Curios. There's so many unanswered questions and curiosities, and this book threw me from page 7. **SEVEN**. It effectively kept me hooked on the mystery while trying to also figure out the life of Benny's mother, who has recently passed. There's the sense that the two are connected, but there's no possible way to work out *how*.

Now, allow me to explain my initial comments upon concluding this novel. I won't detail any spoilers, but I'll add the tag in case it gives you too much of an idea of how things may turn out.

(view spoiler)

There are some interesting, if familiar, characters, and I particularly enjoyed Cora's growth. She seemed so easy to look down on at the start but by the end of the novel I really appreciated who she was. Plus if I had a neighbour that constantly bought me cake I'm pretty sure we'd be BFFs instantly.

This was a true delight to read, and I think fans of Australian fiction will enjoy this small town story that revolves around a mysterious man and a new girl settling in. It's set in 1993 so there's some fun references, and it paints such a beautiful, peaceful portrait of a quaint little life.

Highly recommend.

*With thanks to Allen & Unwin for my ARC to read and review.*

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### **Cass Moriarty says**

In Cedar Valley (Allen & Unwin Books 2018), author Holly Throsby depicts the minutiae of small-town life with pitch-perfect precision. The rural Australian archetypes (of people, of buildings, of community groups, of so many things) are familiar and relevant, and contribute much to this novel's entertainment factor.

Cedar Valley is a village brimming with secrets, lies, gossip and innuendo, and when a well-dressed stranger appears one day in 1993, sits himself outside the local antiques shop and waits there, unmoving, for hours, the rumours begin to fly.

Cedar Valley reminded me a little of The Dressmaker by Rosalie Ham – so many of the townsfolk named and identified by their eccentricities, their unusual habits and their secret vices. At the very heart of the town lies an unexplained crime that at first seems unconnected to the locals. But as the narrative progresses, the links between this historical event and this small community become crucial to solving it.

21-year-old Benny Miller is another stranger who arrives in town on the same day as the man and moves into the green cottage belonging to Odette Fisher, an old friend of her mother. After leaving university, her boyfriend and her father, Benny is looking for answers about the mystery of her mother's life and recent death. Odette takes Benny under her wing, and as the two women become acquainted, and grow to like and respect each other, the past is gradually uncovered.

This novel is peopled with a wonderful cast of characters and is written with wit and humour and a keen observation of human nature. And the book rockets along at a cracking pace – even though the setting and characters are fairly quiet by nature (even the local police are almost comical in their pursuit of the truth), the plot nevertheless unfolds rapidly and with just the right amount of tension to keep our attention. This is one of those books that whisper 'just one more page' to you until you find you have consumed the entire book, all the time never knowing exactly what you will find at the end. I haven't yet read Holly Throsby's debut, Goodwood, but I'm keen now to do so, especially as I noticed a tangential mention of Goodwood in this book.

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### **Daisy Thomas says**

I found this book so charming and readable - I didn't want it to end and when it did end, it ended rather suddenly with still a couple of questions unanswered. While I like things tied up all really neatly, I get that sometimes they aren't entirely. Overall, great writing, as always, by Holly Throsby. As a reader, you get a good feel for place and characters in her books.

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### **Marianne says**

Cedar Valley is the second novel by Australian songwriter, musician and novelist, Holly Throsby. It's the first day of December, 1993, a Wednesday, when twenty-one-year-old Benny Miller drives to Cedar Valley in the hope of learning more about her mother. An enigmatic woman, Vivian Moon was not much of a mother: she virtually abandoned her daughter at five months into the care of Benny's vaguely competent father, Frank Miller, visiting only sporadically, and not for years before her recent death. At the invitation of



her mother's best friend, Benny is staying in Odette Fisher's vacant cottage in Cedar Valley.

Once settled in, Benny ventures down Valley Road into a crowd of people gathered on the footpath outside Cedar Valley Curios and Old Wares. There on the pavement sits a neatly dressed man, dead. Who he is, how he died and why right here in Cedar Valley, are all mysteries. But before any details are known, some people are already remarking on the uncanny similarity to that famous unsolved case, Adelaide's Somerton Man.

Detective Sergeant Anthony Simmons has his constables on the job: photos, fingerprints, a post mortem by the strangely fascinating Dr Ping Williams, routine enquiries of witnesses and, when all that fails to identify the mystery man, a sketch artist for the public appeal for information. Clues come from unexpected sources: even Tony's elderly mother, Elsie provides useful input.

Meanwhile, Benny visits Odette in her hillside house and the two gradually discover the woman that Vivian was. There are surprises in that for both of them, and some of what they learn is disturbing. Of course they also discuss the dead man: it's naturally the talk of the whole town, and everyone has a theory.

What a marvellous tale Throsby gives the reader! An intriguing plot with several twists and a few red herrings to keep the pages turning until the final "aha" moment. All this in a setting so well rendered that, along with the cover picture, readers familiar with the area are sure to have a certain town fixed in their minds. But it could be any NSW small town with its attractive and its less desirable qualities, and that includes the residents.

While some are necessarily a little stereotypical and therefore one-dimensional (the obligatory sleazebag, his eternally complaining wife, the overweight cop), the townspeople are, of course, what makes this novel. If they are all believably flawed, many are also kind and generous and wise (of that wife, Elsie Simmons says that some people connect to the world through their complaints about it). Even the busybody has unexpected depth. It soon becomes apparent why they love their town.

Throsby's second novel is clever and captivating and heart-warming. There's plenty of (sometimes very black) humour and more than one mystery to be solved. Readers unfamiliar with the work of this talented author are likely to seek out her debut novel, Goodwood. A brilliant read.

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## **Joanne says**

First time reading this author. It started as an interesting read, the style of writing is good. However there is certainly something missing I just couldn't put my finger on it. It reminded me of days and times not that long ago in Australia, sadly which are beginning to disappear rather rapidly. The reference to cicadas and typical sounds of summer brought back such vivid memories I just loved that. As for the mystery we'll still trying to find that. It's there and probably a good one but for me the story and mystery seem to go around and around, and each time it recapped another little clue was there for the understanding. Hmmm ??? but I am sure many people will love it and that's great. Thanks to Allen and Unwin for my paperback copy.

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