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# MATEWAN GARDEN CLUB

*Iris Underwood*

Eighteen-year-old Henry Blankenship dreams of building a house for his childhood sweetheart, Annie Dill, and his mother, Gertie, known by their hill folk as the “woman with a shovel.” Annie dreams of six children and a room of her own to pen unsung legacies of Appalachian women—yet, Annie’s mother, Margaret Dill, president of Matewan Garden Club, has other grand ideas for her only child. Unwittingly, Russian refugees Natalia Semenov and her son Olaf, Henry’s employers and owners of Hunt’s Feed & Seed, come to his and Annie’s rescue.

*Matewan Garden Club* spans three generations and a multitude of dreams amongst the tight-knit West Virginia immigrant coal camps and towns along Tug Fork: Matewan, Williamson, Blackberry City, Red Jacket, Thacker Holler, and countless hollers in between. Like Tug River’s many tributaries, these communities converge in Matewan to build enduring love amid the business of native flora and fauna—seedlings that bloom in the hard times of the Bolshevik Revolution, impoverished post-WWI Europe, Depression-era America, and beyond.

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### About the Author



Kentucky-born **Iris Lee Underwood** is a Michigan-based journalist, poet, and author, past president of Detroit Working Writers, and former writer in residence at the Troy Public Library. She writes an award-winning weekly column, “Honest Living,” for Tri-City Times (Imlay City), and her bylines have appeared in *MacGuffin*, *Farming Magazine*, *Michigan Gardener*, *edibleWOW*, *Michigan History*, and many metro Detroit and Kentucky-area newspapers. Iris has published three books: *Encouraging Words for All Seasons* (2001), *Growing Lavender and Other Poems* (2007), and *The Mantle* (2018), her first award-winning novel. Iris enjoys advocating for wholesome husbandry and encouraging people to write their own story and leave their own legacy. She lives in north Oakland County with her husband, two cats, hens, and honeybees.

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Genre: Adult Fiction		Distributed by Ingram and Belle Isle Books	
Printed Book Size: 5.5 x 8.5”		Printed Page Count: 254	
Format	Hardcover	Paperback	Ebook
ISBN	978-1-958754-26-9	978-1-958754-27-6	978-1-958754-28-3
Price	\$30.95	\$19.95	\$11.99

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Belle Isle Books, an imprint of Brandylane Publishers, Inc.  
5 South First Street, Richmond, VA 23219