



Moon Pool

Janet Lane Walters
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By the Light of the Moon

In the heart of the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York lies a tranquil pool of spring-fed water. It is said, among the Native Americans whose ancestors once roamed those lands, that the pool is filled with magic.

The stories vary, of course, given the way such tales will change in the telling; but within each lies a common theme: if you visit the pool on the night of a full moon and gaze into the light-tinged water, you will see the face of your true beloved.

In some tales, there is an adjunct: if you lose your love, go to the Moon Pool on the night of a blue moon and you will find true love again.

The moon is full, and the night is deep and dark. Stroll through the maze until you reach the center then, if you dare, lean over the silent water...and believe.



MOON POOL



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MOON POOL

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— Jane Toombs

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Three things cannot be long
hidden: the sun, the moon
and the truth.

— Buddha



Blue Moon

BY

JANET LANE WALTERS



Prologue

The full moon dappled the shadows beneath the massive oak. Thea caught Luke's hand. He spun her to face him. Their gazes locked. His dark eyes mirrored her eagerness to be together, to make love. Thea wanted to laugh with the joy flooding her.

His lips found hers. He pulled her into a tight embrace. She felt the hardness of his erection and opened her mouth to his questing tongue. His touch, his taste, the aroma of his skin made her desire blossom.

There wasn't time for what they craved. With a sigh, she broke the kiss.

Luke slid his hands to her waist. She sighed again.

"I want to be like this with you forever."

He kissed the corner of her mouth. "I'd rather be skin to skin."

"That, too."

He groaned. "I'd better head back. My turn to set the tables for tomorrow."

"And I've beds to turn down."

"Meet me at the reflecting pool in an hour."

"I'll be there."

He tugged her closer. Their mouths met in a searing kiss.

"You're driving me crazy."

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She nodded. “An hour will seem like forever.”

He released her and dashed toward the kitchen entrance of the sprawling inn.

Thea leaned against the tree. What a splendid summer. Until now, she'd never thought she would find love. Luke was wonderful, and he was hers. For longer than the summer, she prayed.

She glanced at her watch. The luminous dial showed she had a few minutes before she needed to be at her duties. The moon gleamed like a golden coin. She had time to test the legend of the reflecting pool.

“Should a man or a woman come to the pool on a night when the moon is full, the face of their true love will be revealed.” The words, spoken by the hostess to each new group of visitors rang in Thea's memory. . “If they reject the vision, a life of lonely sadness will follow. However, if the seeker returns to the pool when the moon is full and blue, true love will be recovered.”

Thea ran to the garden. She paused beneath the trellis and listened for voices. When she heard none, a wave of relief made her smile. She stepped into the boxwood maze and hurried along the gravel path to the pool. She knelt and stared at the water. Dancing beams of moonlight coalesced. Thea studied the unfolding pattern. When Luke's face appeared, her laughter pierced the sound of cheerful crickets..

Holding the promise close, she ran back to the lodge. Wait until she saw Luke and told him. Happiness threatened to erupt. Thea Carr-grind, nerd and all those other names her peers called her—had found her true love. Thea, who had never had a date until this summer had found her perfect mate.

Luke was the best-looking of the lodge's summer employees. Tall, dark-haired Luke was hers. They had so

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many common interests. When they weren't making love, they talked—and seldom disagreed.

She thought of the way the other female employees and some of the younger guests flirted with him. From the moment their eyes met, they had been a couple.

Thea arrived on the second floor and began her evening routine. She opened the first of her assigned rooms, folded down the covers and placed a chocolate on each pillow. She entered the bathroom to make sure there was a good supply of fluffy towels.

“Thea.”

She walked to the door. Sue leaned against the wall.

“You finished already?”

“Just. You're running late, and I know why.” Her friend giggled. “Saw you and Luke sneak off.”

“For ten minutes. No big deal.”

Sue cocked her head. “I wanted to catch you before you two disappeared to make out.”

The knowing look in her eyes caused Thea to stiffen. They had been friends since grade school, but Thea had often wondered why the friendship had continued through high school and into college. Sue was pretty and popular. Her attention was flattering and brought Thea into the center of events. Thea still helped Sue with her studies. She'd even written papers for her friend. Sometimes, she wondered if being on the fringes of the in-crowd was worth the effort.

Still, if she dropped Sue, where would another friend be found? She smiled. There was Luke.

Thea closed the door and walked/went to her next room.

“Luke and I do more than make out. We talk about serious matters.”

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“Sure you do.” Sue grinned. “Just wanted to let you know there’s a party in the guest lounge to celebrate his birthday.”

“He never mentioned it to me.”

Sue’s smile turned sly. “For good reason. Guess he didn’t want you to know today he turns seventeen. Surprised me when I learned. He looks and acts our age.”

Thea swallowed. Luke was only seventeen? She’d be twenty-two in November.

“But he’s a junior in college. He’s pre-med.”

“Heard he’s a genius. Double major, too.” Sue stepped back. “You two are quite the topic in the staff lounge. Some of the girls call you a cradle-robber. I told them if you’d known his age you would have cut him cold.”

Thea felt her face flame. How could she have made such a fool of herself? Luke was seventeen. She could be in real trouble. Everyone knew and laughed at her.

“Look, we’re just friends. We talk about medicine and surgery.”

Sue arched a brow. “With a few anatomy lessons thrown in. Don’t blame you one bit. I wouldn’t mind a night or two exploring his body. He is one gorgeous hunk. See you.”

Thea waited until Sue vanished down the rear stairs. She quickly finished her rooms and fled to the staff sleeping quarters. Tears stung her eyes. Why hadn’t he told her before she’d become the staff’s joke of the summer?

She splashed water on her face. Luke would be at the reflecting pool. She intended to let him know how she felt about his deception.

Chapter 1

Thea removed the diplomas from the wall of her office. Today was her last as nurse manager of the cardiac unit. Yesterday, her divorce had become final. Every piece of her life had ended. She had no idea what she would do now, but the divorce settlement and her savings would keep her solvent until she decided.

She slumped on the chair behind the desk that had been hers for five years. Leaving City Hospital was the right move. She couldn't remain here and allow her ex, a staff cardiologist, to continue chipping away her self-esteem the way he had during their two years of marriage and one of separation.

Why had she married Tom? The answer shamed her. She'd been afraid she'd run out of time to have a family. Only after the wedding had she learned he didn't want children, just a second income.

A rap on the door interrupted her thoughts.

"Sue, come to say goodbye? Ten minutes later, and you would have missed me." An event she would have welcomed.

"The day's been hectic—one problem after another." Sue lounged against the doorframe. Her bleached hair looked as if she had just left her bed or some steamy affair she'd been known to pursue. "I'm glad I caught you before you left."

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Thea's thoughts flashed to another time when she'd seen Sue take the same casual position and the heartache that had followed. That incident had turned a close friendship into a distant and wary one. Now their only connection was the hospital and the cardiac unit where Sue worked as a nurse and Thea as her boss.

"Have you heard the news?"

"I must be out of the loop."

She arched an eyebrow. "I don't mean about the hospital. Remember Quinnesec Lodge?"

"How could I forget? Working there kept me solvent during college." She forced away the memories of the last summer she'd worked there.

"The place is closing at the end of the season—some company plans to build a conference center. Wouldn't it be a hoot to stay there as a guest instead of as one of the help?"

Would it? Thea wondered. She wasn't sure she wanted to be in a place where the memories would bring heartache and shame. Yet part of her remembered sultry nights with a special man.

"Are you going?"

"Wouldn't miss it. Most of the old gang will be there. Why don't you join us? You have the time and the money."

Thea wrinkled her nose. She had been thinking of a trip somewhere, anywhere. To regroup. Would a return to the lodge erase all that had happened in the past? Would he come?

"Why not? We had some good times." Surely Luke wouldn't come. Did she want to see him again? What if he arrived? She drew a deep breath. She could avoid him the way she had before. Perhaps a week at the lodge would rid herself of all the baggage remaining from that summer.

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"I happen to know there are still a couple of rooms left."

"I'll get the number and call."

Sue eased away from the doorway and dropped a piece of paper on the desk.

"The dates and the lodge's number."

"I'll call for reservations as soon as I get home."

"And like old times, can I ride up with you? I don't have a car."

Thea swallowed. "The company will be great." Years ago, Sue hadn't had a car, either.

"Talk to you tonight."

After Sue left, Thea hoisted the box containing the diplomas and the few odds and ends she had collected. Did she really want to return to the lodge? Why had Sue encouraged her to go? These days, they hardly spoke. Had she learned there had been no recommendation for the nurse manager's position? Thea had been asked by the director for a name, but she had refrained from making a suggestion. Did Sue think she could wheedle a recommendation the way she had begged Thea to write her papers?

Stop seeing problems where none exist, she told herself.

She left the hospital and drove to her apartment. There, she set the box on the coffee table. Rather than visiting old and painful times, she should be making decisions. Should she stay in the city or seek a new place? Would she return to school or find a new job? She felt unsettled. At the lodge, she would have time to think.

Decision made, she reached for the phone. Before she had could persuade herself to back out, she dialed the number and asked for a room for the dates Sue had given her.

"That's a busy week," the reservation clerk said. "There's one room with a hold on it, Ms. Carr. Wait a minute... The

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room is yours. Imagine you've heard about the prophecy. There's a full moon that week, the second in the month."

"A blue moon."

"That's what it's called." She took the credit card information and gave her a confirmation number.

Thea hung up and sank onto the couch. A blue moon. The reflecting pool. She had seen Luke's face and run away from him. But beneath a blue moon, she could look for love again. Although she had no reason to believe the past could be undone, hope blossomed.



Thea parked in the circular driveway at Quinnesec Lodge. She stared at the sprawling building. Shows its age, she thought. The porch and window trim needed paint. One of the railings had been patched. Even the chairs on the porch seemed tired.

Sue opened the passenger door.

"Come on. I want to see if any of the old gang has arrived."

Thea stepped from the car.

"What about our luggage?"

A young man approached.

"I'll take the bags and park the car. The keys will be at the front desk."

"Thank you." Thea slipped him a bill. She crossed the grass and caught up with Sue at the steps.

The front door opened. A tall, dark-haired man stepped onto the porch. Thea's heart skipped a beat, and her breath caught. Luke. The years had honed his features and broadened his shoulders.

Sue jabbed her ribs.

"Don't blame you for staring. The man is still prime."

Thea couldn't move. "Wonder why he came?"

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“To show us how successful he’s become. He’s a surgeon at University Hospital, and he’s loaded.” Sue charged up the steps. “Luke! Luke Sewell. Remember me? Sue Gray. And I’m sure you haven’t forgotten Thea.”

Thea fought to hide a grimace of distaste. A note of a taunt rang in Sue’s voice.

He nodded. “Nice to see you again.” His hands remained in his trouser pockets.

To Thea he sounded anything but glad. She grasped the railing to control an urge to return to the car and drive away..

“You look fantastic.” Sue latched onto Luke’s arm.

Thea passed them. “We need to register.”

“I’m so glad you decided to join us.” Sue smiled at Luke. “I often think of the summer we worked together. The next year Thea was in England.” She stroked his forearm. “Won’t it be great to be guests? Still, I’ll miss the old days. Won’t you?”

“Not particularly.” He stepped away. “Don’t let me keep you. I’m sure we’ll see each other during the week.” He turned to Thea.

A nervous smile curved her lips. The sound of his deep voice had brought memories to the surface. His icy glare made her swallow. She wanted to tell him she’d made a mistake years ago. She wanted to say she’d allowed the opinions of others to overrule her heart.

Sue laughed. “I’ll make sure we have time together. How long are you staying?”

“Not sure.”

“I’m here for a week. Thea might stay longer. Lucky her. She doesn’t have to work. Her...husband has money.” She sauntered to the door.

Thea sucked in a breath. Why had Sue been so nasty? Regret filled her. Why had she come, and why had Sue

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wanted her here? Was this another attempt by Sue to show her superiority with men?

Thea strode to the reservation desk and glared at her.

“Why did you say I have a husband?”

“Did I? I’m sure I said ex-husband. Luke really studied you. Why did you stand there like a statue?”

“Didn’t you notice he didn’t seem happy to see us?”

“He was surprised.” Sue laughed. “Surely you don’t still think he’s angry with you. He sure didn’t miss you the last summer I was here. He must have had a dozen flings, including one with yours truly.”

“You don’t know what happened between us.”

Sue’s smug smile irritated her.

“Don’t be so sure. You were hoping to see him again. Why else did you come?”

Thea clenched her hands. Admit the truth, she told herself. Hope *had* brought her to the lodge. Luke’s coldness had iced her dreams.



Luke shook his head. Thea was even lovelier than he remembered. She had cut her brown hair into a more sophisticated style. She remained slim. And he still wanted her.

So, she had married a man with money. She didn’t look happy with her choice. He grinned. Her happiness or the state of her marriage wasn’t his business. Why should he care? Thea had been a summer fling.

He thought of Sue and grimaced. He’d spend a summer fending off her advances. Was he in for a repeat of a situation he didn’t want instead of the one that held his hope?

He needed distance so he could think.

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Luke strode toward the tennis court, not that he intended to play. He rubbed his right hand. The injury that had ended his career as a surgeon kept him from taking part in most sports.

Why had Thea come?

When he'd read the clipping about the lodge's final season and the invitation to former staff members to meet here this week, he had wondered if she would show. She had, and now he wished he had stayed away.

His life was a shamble. He had hoped the serene surroundings would give him new purpose. He feared he faced a complication he didn't need.

He wanted Thea with the same desire as before.

He slumped onto a bench. He'd never forgotten the way she had rejected their love?. She'd blamed him his not telling her his age, but her friend had told him the real reason. Thea's behavior during the remainder of that summer had confirmed Sue's story.

Not that he'd wasted his life yearning for her.

Liar. There had been other women, but none of his affairs had lasted long. His thoughts returned to that summer and Sue's avid pursuit. He'd been lucky to escape her.

Interlude

Then

Moonlight shimmered on the reflecting pool. Luke had arrived early to test the power of the legend. Not that he wasn't sure of his feelings for Thea—he was just curious. He knelt at the edge.

A soft breeze rippled the surface of the water. He saw Thea's face, but not the Thea he knew. She appeared older, and her eyes were haunted by sadness. What did it mean?

He heard footsteps on the gravel. He rose and went to the opening to the maze's center.

"Thea?"

Sue emerged from the shadows.

"Thea isn't coming."

"Why not?"

She sauntered toward him and grasped his arms.

"I told her about your birthday party. When she learned your age, she was mortified." She stepped closer and pressed against him. "Your age doesn't matter to me."

"Why are you doing this?"

"To prove you picked the wrong woman." She laughed. "You should have seen her face when she learned everyone was laughing at her. She turned so red her skin was al-

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most purple. Other people's opinions have always mattered to Thea."

Luke tried to move away.

"Leave me alone." He had to find Thea and explain.

Sue pressed her mouth to his. "Show me the things you showed her. I'll add a move or two you'll enjoy." She rubbed against him. "You want me. I can feel you."

As he tried to extract himself from her embrace he grasped her shoulders.

"Not interested."

"Luke!"

Thea's cry startled him. Sue broke away and ducked into the maze.

"Thea, let me explain."

"Don't bother. Did making me look like a fool give you some amusement? I don't want to talk to you every again."

"Thea..."

Chapter 2

When someone tapped on the door of her room, Thea pulled on her robe. She opened the door a crack. Sue pushed inside. Thea frowned.

“Why the rush?”

“You’re not ready yet?” Sue acted oblivious to Thea’s clear displeasure. “Are you planning to skip the get-acquainted cocktail party? Not that there are many guests you don’t know.”

“I’ll be there.”

“You don’t want to miss the appetizers. Pickled shrimp. Remember how we used to snatch them? And the crab puffs and mini-quiches?”

Thea gave in and laughed.

“If I eat all that I won’t have room for dinner.”

“You could be right. Then there’s the dessert in the garden and a re-telling of the legend of the reflecting pool.” Sue smoothed her hands over the slim skirt of her scarlet dress. “Did you ever test the prophecy?”

“That would be telling.” Thea opened the closet. “You don’t have to wait for me.”

“What are you wearing?”

Thea took out her favorite long cotton skirt and a white silk shell.

“This.”

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“Why so casual? You won’t attract men if you don’t flaunt what you have.” The plunging neckline of her dress showed her advice had been self-taken.

“This isn’t a singles’ resort.”

Sue smirked. “There are four unattached men, and one of them I have every intention of snaring. He and I had a very hot summer.” She opened the door. She flipped her bleached blonde hair away from her face. “See you.”

Thea shook her head. Sue hadn’t changed since they were teens. Always wanting to be stage center. She quickly dressed and studied herself. The skirt swirled around her ankles. The shell skimmed the tops of her breasts. *Was* she too casual? She picked up the moonstone pendant Luke had given her; since the day he’d fastened the chain around her neck she’d worn the necklace.

She returned it to the jewel case. Not tonight. If he saw the moonstone, she would be embarrassed. She had ruined any chance of a future with him—although Sue hadn’t seen the flash of anger in his eyes, Thea had.

When she reached the entrance to the dining room, she paused to study the other guests. A piano played softly. She accepted a glass of white wine from a waiter. Sue stood with two couples and a trio of men. Where was Luke? Thea walked to the buffet, took a plate and selected a few tidbits. She turned and saw him.

Luke stood at the end of the table. His glare stabbed her. She noticed his right hand and swallowed a gasp. She’d heard he’d been injured but not the extent. His ring finger was missing. She wanted to hurry to him and offer comfort. She sighed. He would refuse anything she offered.

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Then, as though drawn by invisible strings, she moved toward him. The spicy aroma of his aftershave evoked memories and aroused dormant desires.

He glanced at her. Once more his gaze turned icy. Thea passed him to join the group surrounding Sue.

Sue looked around and pushed past her.

“Luke, we’re over here. You should remember everyone.”

He held up a glass. “After I find a refill.”

When dinner was announced, Thea found her place at the table. Luke sat beside Sue at the other end.

Though delicious, every bite she took lay like lead shot in her stomach.

The hostess rose.

“Dessert will be served in the maze garden.”

Thea put her fork on the plate. Her companions rose and headed toward the patio. She chose the other direction, but Sue caught her arm.

“Dessert’s this way.”

Thea shook her head. “I’m for bed. The drive was tiring.”

“I could have spelled you at the wheel.”

“Do you have a license?”

She nodded. “Got it for the picture ID and for the times I rent a car for a trip.” She pulled Thea outside. “Did you see Luke’s hand? He wouldn’t tell me what happened.”

“Maybe he wants to forget.”

She halted beneath a huge oak.

“So, you do know. Are the two of you pretending you never see each other? Is Luke the reason your marriage to a terrific man fell apart?”

Thea drew a deep breath. “I haven’t seen Luke since that summer, but I know what happened. He’s a hero.”

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Sue stepped closer. "So, give."

"His hand was crushed when he crawled into a collapsed building to save the life of two boys."

"Why didn't I hear about this?"

"You were on a cruise. The story was all over the news. He's lost his ability to be a surgeon."

Sue made a face. "He's still a doctor." She stepped away. "And he's still a hunk."

"*And* he walked away when you tried to drag him to the garden. Maybe you should leave him alone."

"So, you are still interested." Sue smoothed her skirt over her hips again.

"Did I say that?"

"Not exactly, but I can tell." She grasped Thea's arm and pulled her toward the trellis arch into the garden. "In a day or so, the moon will be full."

"I'm going to my room."

"Don't be a wimp. Why let a few glares send you running? Luke isn't the only unattached male here. Dave and Jim are divorced, and Bill is separated." She laughed. "Look. We're here."

Thea sighed. Sue had maneuvered her into the garden.

The hostess waved. "Welcome, ladies. Dessert, champagne, coffee and tea are across the way. Be sure to try some of the cold fondue."

Thea paused at the long table. Two crystal bowls rested in pans of ice. She took a plate and dipped pieces of fruit into the dark and white chocolate mixtures. She tasted one and then the other.

"Delicious. How is it made?"

The hostess smiled. "Chef's secret. Sometimes instead of chocolate he uses spices."

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Thea watched Sue saunter to two men seated on one of the benches. She put her plate down and, instead of joining the others, entered the maze.

And collided with Luke.

He grasped her arms to steady her. She felt as though she'd been zapped by cardiac paddles.

"Sorry."

"So am I."

His voice had the same effect as his touch. She stepped back. Had he felt the same jolt?

For a moment, his gaze softened.

"My fault." She meant for the past as well as the present.

"I'm surprised your husband allows you to visit old scenes alone."

Thea met his gaze. "He's an ex-husband, and he doesn't care what I do."

His eyes narrowed and seemed to strip her naked.

"So, you came with Sue. I'm amazed, especially after what she did to you years ago."

Thea frowned. "Excuse me? All she did was tell me the truth you hid from me."

"And managed matters so you saw her in my arms. For the record, I didn't know *your* age, either." His hands dropped to his sides. "Maybe you should ask her why."

"Isn't it too late?" Her throat felt dry, and her eyes burned. She wouldn't cry. Not where he could see her.

"Why did you come?"

Thea stared at the ground. *For a foolish reason* was the appropriate answer, but she wouldn't burden him with her regrets or hopes.

"To put the past aside and to think about the future. Lately, my life has been turned on end."

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“Know the feeling.” He raised his injured hand. “This sabotaged my future as a surgeon.”

“There are other ways to practice medicine.”

Luke shook his head. “My dreams died when my hand was ruined. Surgery was my passion.” He wheeled and strode away.

The bleakness in his voice troubled Thea. She bit her lower lip. What if she hadn’t learned the truth about his age or his involvement with Sue? What if she’d been strong enough to listen to her heart? What if he’d been older? She could have helped him overcome his disappointment. Tears trickled down her cheeks. She still loved him.

Was there a way to show him he had a future as a doctor? She couldn’t ask him to love her—the moment for that was long past. With a sigh, she continued to the reflecting pool. Would she find the courage to come again when the moon was full and blue? If she did, would she see hope...or shattered dreams?



Thea wasn’t married, and Sue was up to her old tricks. Luke left the maze. Why should he care? Thea had walked away. Part of the fault had been his—he hadn’t told her his age. But he *hadn’t* known hers. She had looked younger than her years then *and* now. Time hadn’t erased the five years’ difference in their ages.

He sucked in a deep breath. When they’d collided, he had wanted to hold her close and kiss her until she surrendered. Nothing but memories and lust. He worked hard to persuade himself it was the truth.

Her scent lingered. He could feel the softness of her skin, taste lips that held a hint of chocolate.

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Get a grip. The best move would be to check out tomorrow rather than stay for the two weeks he'd booked. He had come to the Lodge hoping to find new goals. Now he wasn't sure he could. Not when the past had just slammed into his chest and triggered? yearnings he didn't want.

"Luke, don't run off," Sue called. "Come here and tell us what you've been doing."

"Maybe tomorrow." He strode away,

She reached his side. Her cloying perfume made him sneeze.

"Be a sport and spend some time with us. Thea said you were a hero. We want to hear the details."

"I won't talk about that."

"Then tell us about your success. I've heard you're a gifted surgeon."

Maybe she measured success by the MD after his name. People often did. He imagined Thea also saw his title as a measure of success. Considering how she had given so much weight to the opinions of others in the past, that was a good guess. He brushed past Sue and continued to the lodge.

Stay or leave? He mentally flipped a coin. He'd would remain here for a few days and find solitude. In the morning, he would grab a lunch from the kitchen and hike up the mountain.



Just before noon, Thea picked up a lunch from the kitchen; she had no desire to join one of the planned activities. At breakfast, Sue's incessant chatter about the pluses and minuses of the available men had given her a headache. Escape was essential.

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She strode along the trail that led to a meadow where she and Luke had made love one summer afternoon. As she entered the path the cool shade of the trees had closed around her. She welcomed the relief from the glaring sun.

When she reached the stream, she looked for the stepping stones and was relieved to find they remained. She stooped to untie her shoes so she could keep them dry. Behind her, the bushes rustled. She froze. A bear? The rustling grew louder. Thea prepared to run.

“Lady, can you help me? Please?”

“Guess you’re not a bear.” A sigh of relief escaped.

“No, ma’am.”

“Are you from the lodge? Are you hurt? Lost?” Thea parted the bushes and found a dark-haired boy probably ten years old or so. His denim shorts and gray T-shirt, although shabby, were clean. Worry lines wrinkled his forehead.

“No, ma’am. Live up there.” He pointed to a trail that led away from the one she had used.

“Why do you need help?”

“Mama sent me. The littles are burnin’ with fever. Got no phone, and the truck won’t start.”

Thea rose. “I’m a nurse. Show me where you live. We can make a call on my cell phone.”

“Got no money for a doctor. That’s what Mama said.”

Thea picked up her lunch. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thanks, ma’am.”

“Call me Thea. I know a doctor at the lodge. If he’s needed, I’ll send you for him. He won’t charge.” If he wanted money, she could handle the fees.

She followed the boy. *Even if Luke doesn’t believe there’s life after surgery, he can help.*

Janet Lane Walters

Before long, the path rounded a bend. Thea saw a ramshackle house. She followed him across the porch to the kitchen door. A woman turned from the stove. Dark shadows stained the skin beneath her weary hazel eyes. She wiped a hand across her forehead brushing back sweaty auburn hair.

“Hi, I’m Thea Carr. Your son said you needed help.”

“Mama, she’s a nurse. Wants to see the littles.”

“Faith Trent. Bless you for coming.”

“You’re here alone?”

Faith nodded. “Jimmy, my husband, died eight months ago.”

“I’m sorry.” Thea stood at the table. “What’s wrong with the children?”

“The younger three are feverish. Kept me up all night.”

Thea studied Faith’s haggard face. She was younger than she looked.

“Where are they?”

“Back bedroom. Buddy can show you.”

Thea nodded. “Go lie down—you look ill yourself. I’ll see what needs to be done.”

Faith sank onto one of the mismatched wooden chairs.

“Made some willow bark tea for the fever. My mama was a dosing woman.”

Willow bark tea. Thea knew the bark contained salicylates. How much should she use?

“I’ve no experience with the tea.”

“Made it as strong as possible. Stirred in some honey. Give them a spoon or two every couple hours.”

Thea looked for a sink to wash her hands and spotted the pump in the yard. No running water. Great.

Blue Moon

“Buddy, after you show me the children, bring a bucket of cold water and some cloths.”

She followed the boy down the hall. Two little girls and a boy slept in a large bed. The oldest two could be no more than five or six. At first she thought they were boys but realized they were fraternal twins. The youngest was barely more than a toddler. Thea checked their foreheads. Definitely a temperature, but how high? She wished for a thermometer, a bathtub and some of the hospital equipment and supplies she knew how to use.

Quickly, she stripped the woolen blankets away and removed the children’s flannel pajamas. Buddy brought the pan of tea, a spoon and the cloths. A short time later, he lugged in a bucket of water. Thea looked at the tea. Dared she use it? She had no other fever remedy.

She dipped some of the tea and dosed the first child. Once all three had swallowed a dose, she wiped them down with the cool water?.

When all were sleeping, she looked for Buddy. She found him in the kitchen.

“Are you hungry?”

He shrugged. “Not much here. Mama was going to make chicken stew.”

She opened the box from the lodge.

“We’ll share.”

She divided the sandwiches and salad. Though Buddy wanted to save the cookies for the other children, but Thea shook her head.

“When they’re better I’ll bring more.”

She reached for her cell phone but couldn’t remember the number of the inn. Anyone whose number she had in her contact list were in the city and would be of no help. She could send Buddy, but the children were responding to her treatment.

Janet Lane Walters

By early evening, her patients felt cooler. Thea managed to coax them all to drink water. Satisfaction brought a rush of warmth. Although she had failed as a wife and lover, her nursing skills were solid.

She rose from the chair at the bedside and returned to the kitchen. Faith stood at the stove.

“How are the kids?”

“Cooler. Sleeping. That’s what you should be doing.”

She smiled. “Had a long nap. Have a pan of chicken broth simmering and made a chicken stew and biscuits. Can’t pay you, but I can feed you.”

“I don’t want payment. Working here has been good for me.”

Faith put two bowls and a pan of biscuits on the table. “Sit and eat.”

“Where’s Buddy?”

“Doing his chores.” She sat opposite Thea. “When I was in high school, I wanted to be a nurse. Even enrolled at the community college.”

“What happened?” Thea tasted the stew and smiled.

Faith laughed. “Fate. Worked at the lodge. Met Jimmy.”

“I worked there, too.”

“Did you visit the reflecting pool?”

Thea nodded. “On the night of a full moon.”

“Me, too. Saw Jimmy’s face and knew I couldn’t turn away from what was meant to be.”

“Do you regret giving up your dreams?”

Faith shook her head. “How could I regret loving him for as long as I had him? We didn’t have much, but we had love and four children. Didn’t need more.”

Thea reached for the tea. “I...never mind.”

Faith met her gaze. “Sorry it didn’t work for you.”

Blue Moon

“My own fault.” Thea took another bite. “This is delicious.”

“My way of thanking you for all you’ve done. You’d better head back—you won’t want to be walking the woods after dark.”

“I’ll stay the night and watch the children. The rest will do you good.”

“Won’t you be missed?”

Who would miss me? Thea wondered.

“I’m at the lodge alone.”

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