

Willow's Moon Song



**Sleep
Medicine**

Archer Atwood



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In the Year of the Comet 2243

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This story is rated for adult subject matter, strong emotions, and mild paranormal content.

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Sleep Medicine

by Archer Atwood

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Chapter One

In the Year of the Comet 2243

Introductions

The watering can was made of tin and covered in hand painted flowers. As the clear liquid flowed out of its long necked spout into the plant's pot, Miss Moon looked out the multi paned window to the parking lot below. Her gaze went past the large willow tree, and past the maple tree that still clung to many of its bright red leaves, to the wooden building next door. In front of it, along the sidewalk, were printed election signs held up by simple metal frames. The grinning faces of local politicians adorned them. Mulling about the Community Center building were many people. Today was Election Day. The creased corners of Miss Moon's mouth raised into a smile upon seeing a tall handsome person with short dark wavy hair having an intense debate with one of the folk running for office. "Oh, Jesse." she remarked with affection right before she heard the loud sigh behind her.

Putting the watering can down, Miss Moon, whose age is unknown, though looks close to eighty years, turned away from her large bay window that was decorated with hanging plants to face into the small room off the main library. This was her domain: the Resource Room. She knew when the young woman with warm skin tone and features had come in. She knew she gathered up newspapers and pamphlets and sat down at the long wood table in the center of the room. A table that had been in this small building that looked like a miniature castle for as long as Miss Moon was old.

When the young woman came in, she was chipper and appeared to know what she wanted to research. Now her whole body spoke frustration and defeat.

Bypassing her wood desk heaped high with old books, Miss Moon moved on silent purple colored sneakers toward the woman. A purple color that matched her dress.

She sat down across from her. “That bad?”

The woman raised hazel colored eyes to her. “That obvious?”

“What can I help you with?”

“Job hunting and looking for daycare. It’s not going well.” She regarded her watch. “I should go check on my daughter. She is downstairs in the Children’s Department.”

“Not to worry.” Miss Moon assured her. “I know the children down there. They will watch out for her.”

The woman shifted to get up. “I don’t know. She can be odd at times. She may scare them.”

Smiling her famous kind smile, Miss Moon motioned her to sit still. “Trust me. The boy is Randy Monroe. That boy has a very unique parent. Nothing shocks him anymore. And the little girl, his little friend, not sure what name she is going by today, she lives with her parents in the woods and is home-schooled by several aunties. She is use to odd.”

The woman relaxed. “That is part of my problem. Lois has gone through many babysitters and daycares. I’m at a loss.”

“I am Miss Moon. And you are?”

“Jolene.”

“I haven’t seen you around here.”

“We just moved into town.” Jolene looked down at the table. “You could say we had to get out of town and landed here. Broke, without a job, no one.”

“You have me.”

Jolene regarded the old woman in front of her. “That is nice of you to say. Now if you could pull a job out of the air for me,”

“How odd?”

“Excuse me?”

“Your daughter. You said she is odd. In what way?”

“Oh, well, she seems to know things about people that make them uncomfortable.”

“Interesting. Now tell me what you do for a living.”

“I’m a nurse.”

“That pays well.”

“Not when you have a child and you are on your own to pay all expenses. Then trying to find an understanding daycare that will take her any time of the day or week. That can get expensive.”

Miss Moon nodded sympathetically.

They fell into silence. Jolene stared hopelessly at the papers in front of her, while Miss Moon studied her.

After a few moments Miss Moon asked, “What of her father?”

Jolene huffed and shook her head. “I have no idea who he is. He came out of a bottle.” Noticing the inquisitive look on Miss Moon’s face, Jolene reeled in her sarcasm. “I was artificially inseminated. Thought at the time it was a good idea. Well, my partner and I thought it was. Then things went sour after a year and we broke up. Then I ran across a guy I knew from college. Thought maybe I would be happier switching sides so to speak, and Lois would be happier with a dad.” She sighed and grumbled, “That didn’t pan out. He was a total jerk. We fought all the time. Lois didn’t need that in her life, so we left him. While I was trying to sort things out, he got a good lawyer and robbed me blind.” She leaned back as tears formed in her eyes. She stated, “And here we are. Like I said, broke, no job, not even sure I can pay the rent on our new apartment.” She dabbed her eyes. “I can’t believe I just told a total stranger all that.”

“I am a stranger no more. And I may have an idea.” Miss Moon announced.

Jolene blinked back her tears. “I am willing to entertain any and all at this point.”

“Peaceful Valle Rest Home. They are looking for a night nurse”

“That is nice, except I don’t have anyone to watch Lois while I work nights.”

“Take her with you.”

Jolene scoffed, “What? I don’t think that would be allowed.”

Miss Moon’s smile raised the wrinkles on her forehead. “They don’t have to know. Work a few long shifts a week to cover your expenses. You tuck her in to an empty bed, do your job, no one is the wiser.”

She scowled at Miss Moon. "It's not right. If I got caught I would surely lose my job and maybe my license."

"They have been having trouble filling the other night nurse position. I don't know why, it's a lovely and caring facility. That is your leverage." From her dress pocket Miss Moon produced a business card for the place. She laid it down in front of Jolene. "You can use me as a reference." She chuckled, "And not because I am the reference librarian."

Jolene cautiously lifted up the card. "You just happened to have this in your pocket?"

Changing the subject, Miss Moon asked, "The agency you used. Where was it?"

Jolene narrowed her eyes, "Agency for what?"

"The sperm bank."

"Oh. A small clinic outside Boston." Jolene tucked the business card into her tote bag on the floor next to her foot. "I have told people not to use it."

"Why is that?"

"They showed me a book with the profiles of the men who donated. Lois doesn't look a thing like the one I picked or anyone in my family. I know she is mine because I saw her come out." This time she did stand up. "Thank you for your help. And I still can't believe I told you all that." She puzzled at the older woman.

Miss Moon stood up too, standing several inches shorter. "Sometimes you just need to let go."

Children's laughter could be heard coming closer.

Jolene's eyes widened in surprise. "That is my daughter. It has been a long time since I heard her laugh like that."

Miss Moon started back to her desk. "I believe our little town is going to be good for the both of you." When she reached her desk in the Resource Room of the Willow Library, Jolene was gone around the corner of the tall forest of bookcases in the next room. She sat down in her chair and twisted her mouth in contemplation. "Odd behavior. Mysterious origins. Interesting."

Chapter Two

First Night



11 PM: Jolene took a deep cleansing breath and attempted to stand up straight. “You got this.” she whispered to herself. “The Director said they sleep, no real meds to give out, just take care of paperwork and make sure everyone stays safe. It is just weekends.”

A slight tug on the skirt of her white uniform made her look down.

“Is something wrong, Mommy?”

Jolene who had honey warm skin, hazel eyes, and dark hair, regarded her five-year-old daughter with the pale freckled face and light brown pig-tails holding a well loved stuffed rabbit. “I’m just a little nervous. New job and all.” She took a step back on the lighted front porch and turned to face the driveway where the sign PEACEFUL VALLEY HOME was illuminated. “Isn’t it a little odd to have this place so far out in the country?” She looked out at the dark woods just past the small parking lot that held only four cars. One was hers. Not waiting for her daughter to respond, she quickly went on, “Took us forever to come up that hill through the woods. The only light was from the moon. What happened to the valley like the sign says? I don’t know. Seems a bit unsafe.” Her voice trailed off as she suddenly imagined eyes looking back at her from those dark woods. “And what about the winter? It could be slippery. Do you think they even plow it out?”

She rolled her eyes, turned back around to face the door, and deep breathed again.

“We need the money. How bad can it be?”

The girl smiled showing some newly fallen out baby teeth.

Jolene couldn't help but smile back. It was enough to give her the courage to make it official. She reached for the doorknob. “Yes, they said they sleep. I won't be busy.”

Just inside was a small quiet foyer with a simple desk adorned with a lit lamp and a vase of fresh flowers next to a notebook for signing in visitors. There were two doors, one to the right and one to the left. Each had a doorbell and a sign that said, ‘Please ring to enter after 8pm’.

“Here goes nothing!” Jolene said to her daughter. “Now remember, you have to be good and when we are alone, go right to sleep.”

The girl nodded.

Jolene pressed the doorbell to the left sided door.

A voice over an intercom speaker asked, “You the new nurse?”

“Yes, Jolene Vance.”

“Come on in.” was said followed by a buzzing noise.

She turned the doorknob and they stepped into a short hall with doors on either side. One seemed to be a library and the other a room with many tables and chairs. Up ahead was a larger room where a short older woman in a white uniform was watching her approach.

“Well, hurry along. I would like to get home and sleep.” the Nurse said to her as her eyes dropped down to her daughter following behind. “Who is that?”

“My daughter Lois. Her babysitter should be by soon to take her home.” Jolene stated and motioned Lois to go sit on the chair near the wall.

The evening nurse didn't question her. She waved her over to the Nurse's Station, a sectioned off area tucked in a corner of a large community type room that held several comfortable chairs, tables, a silent TV, and tall plants. The room was now dim and the large windows lining one wall were dark. Leading off this room was a long hall with doors to patients' rooms on either side.

“I'm Anna.” the Nurse stated. “Your nursing assistant is doing bed checks. Let me

give you report, we count off meds, and I am out of here.”

Jolene nodded that was fine. She had her courage back. She was all business now.

Lois sat on her chair, hugging her bunny, letting her eyes take it all in, from the shiny linoleum floor, to the easily washed furniture, to the boxes of games and puzzles stacked up on wall shelves.

Fifteen minutes later, Anna hurried by, gave her a wave and left. Once that door closed behind her, the silence was broken. Loud talking could be heard coming from the patient rooms.

Jolene came out of the Nurse’s Station wearing a stethoscope and holding a clipboard. She stepped to the head of that dimly lit hallway just as three elderly patients in nightgowns came out of their rooms and looked back at her. She rolled her eyes and sighed, “So much for a quiet night!”

*

Chapter Three

Baby Doll

Lois knew she was suppose to stay on the sofa in the library of the “Peaceful Valley Home”. She knew she was suppose to fall asleep and not bother her mother. They had made a deal. She was to stay hidden till her mother could sneak her out in the morning. She promised she would not interrupt her mother who was caring for the patients. Stay put: sleep: her Mother told her.

The door was cracked open so the light from hallway would drift in and keep her from being scared. Yes, it was very dim in this room that was lined with shelves full of old books and worn magazines. She should be able to fall asleep. Yet, the rug smelled kinda funny, and the place was strange to her, and she missed her mother.

Little Lois with the freckled face sat up. She held her bunny to her chest. Her eyes scanned all around. That was it, she couldn’t and she wouldn’t stay in this room.

Lois in her nightgown, and Bunny in hers, tip toed down the hall toward the main community room that only had one desk lamp lighting it. It was after midnight. That’s when she heard her mother and another woman talking.

“It’s the set up I have had with all the nurses.” the other woman was saying.

Keeping stooped over and low, Lois started past the Nurses Station counter. That woman’s voice was coming from the other side.

“You get to go home and sleep because your daughter is older. I don’t have that luxury. My husband goes off to work and then I can only nap when the baby does. Lately that is not much. So give me a break. The patients are all sleeping, I just need to grab an hour or so.”

Lois kept moving. She could hear her Mother sighing somewhere near the other

woman. Her mother was considering what was said to her. Not wanting to interrupt, the little girl continued past them.

Flowing out from the community room was the hallway that led to the patient rooms. Half of the overhead lights had been turned off. The hall was softly lit now. Lois decided to investigate.

The first room on the right: 01. Lois peeked in.

It was a small room with a homey dresser and a bed with a wooden frame. The rest of the room, from what you could see with the nightlight in the wall outlet, was pretty standard issue hospital type, with plain walls, tile floor, industrial looking curtains and a walker next to the bed.

Lois took a step inside. Someone moved on the bed.

The small lumps under the blanket settled into a side lying position. A wild mop of white hair was seen on the pillow. The face below the hair held wrinkles accented by the shadows and two wide open eyes on Lois. Old eyes and young eyes stared at each other.

Lois drew closer. That move caused the old eyes to refocus on Bunny. From under the blanket a hand with paper thin skin covering it, appeared. She held it out and motioned she wanted the stuffed animal.

“You promise to give her back?” Lois whispered.

The woman didn’t answer. Her eyes that had lids just as wrinkled as her face, were fixed on the toy.

Cautiously, Lois approached, and even more cautiously she held Bunny out to her.

The old woman gently took it from her. Her whole expression turned to a combination of sadness and relief. She brought it to her face and placed it against her cheek.

That gesture melted Lois. All apprehension was gone. She stepped right up to the bed.

The woman scooted over in the bed.

“Can you talk?” Lois asked her.

The woman moved Bunny down to her breast and tenderly cradled it with both arms. She responded to Lois with an equally tender look.

“I hate to sleep alone, too.” Lois told her. She smiled and proceeded to climb up onto

the bed. That caused Lois to giggle when she realized there was a roll of something firm under the sheets on the edge of the bed. It was a soft barrier to discourage rolling off the bed. Once that was breached, Lois laid down next to the woman in her nest.

Soft creases on the woman's face turned up a little into a smile.

Lying almost nose to nose, sharing the pillow, with Bunny between them, the woman raised her hand and ever so lightly ran it along Lois's head once, then tucked it back around Bunny. She closed her eyes.

Lois studied the woman's face. "You miss your babies, don't you?"

The woman opened her eyes. There were tears in them.

"I will stay with you for awhile." Lois cheerfully whispered.

Worn out tired, Jolene, her white nurse's uniform that was no longer crisp looking, and a bit stained and wrinkled, hurried Lois, still in her nightgown, who was holding Bunny, across the parking lot to their car. The sun was just coming up. Once tucked inside, she let out a long sigh.

"What a night! Sure they said, they will sleep, it will be a quiet shift. Liars! I'm exhausted!"

"Mommy." Lois spoke up from the backseat, all buckled into her booster seat.

Jolene regarded her in the rearview mirror as she put on her seatbelt.

"Can I bring Iris a couple of my dolls tonight?"

"Iris?"

"She misses her babies. And I think if she has a couple dolls to cuddle, it will make her feel better."

Jolene turned in her seat and looked back at her daughter. "Are you talking about the little woman in room one?"

Lois's face lit up. "Yes. She is very nice. Told me she had many children."

"Told you? She doesn't speak. How did she tell you that?"

"She dreamed it to me."

Jolene's forehead wrinkled up. Whenever her daughter started with her odd words, it

worried her so. “You are not to be going near the patients.”

“Iris is sweet.”

Jolene sighed. She was too tired to discuss this now. She started up the car and prepared to pull out just as more staff was arriving. “So where are her children now? Maybe they will visit.”

“She said they are all in heaven waiting for her.”

That made Jolene glance back at her. Lois was not sad or upset. She was just stating a fact.

“She liked holding Bunny. I think she would like some doll babies to hold.”

Jolene smiled and nodded. “Yes, I think that would be very nice.”

Pleased, Lois hugged Bunny and shifted her attention to outside her window. The road was dipping down a hill through the woods that were now a glow with morning sunshine.

*

With experience comes wisdom: As soon as Jolene—now wearing comfortable scrubs—opened the door to enter Wing A of the Peaceful Valley Rest Home, Lois stepped past her and slipped into the little library, so when Nurse Anna stepped out of the Nurses Station at the end of the hall to yell, “Hurry up.” she wouldn’t be seen.

The little girl in pale blue pajamas turned on the lamp that stood in a corner and closed the door. She went to the cabinet at the base of one of the bookcases and opened it. Inside was a large tote-bag that held her pillow, and blankets. As her mother showed her the night before, she laid a blanket down on the small sofa, added her pillow, and the top blanket. She was all set to go to bed. Or not.

From the basket she placed by the door, she pulled out her Bunny and two well-loved dolls, both with cloth bodies and pretty smiles. Taking a deep breath for courage, she went to the lamp and turned it off, plunging her into darkness.

Keeping her wits about her, she made it back to the door, felt for the doorknob, turned it, and opened the door just slightly. It cast in soothing light from the hall, and the perfect

platform to peek out.

“She is going to drive me nuts being late every night.” Nurse Anna muttered, seen only as a blur of white uniform and dark hair as she walked past.

Lois leaned back to avoid being spotted and remained there till she heard the main door close. The coast was now clear.

Smiling to herself because she was on a mission, Lois hustled out. No need to hide anymore. She knew her mother would be busy at the beginning of this shift and she wouldn't notice her. Off to Room One she went.

The little lady made up of small soft lumps under the blanket, opened her eyes when Lois enter the room.

“These are yours until you can hold yours again.” Lois announced and placed the two dolls into Iris's eager arms.

Tenderly and sweetly the elderly woman brought the dolls to her heart and hugged and kissed them. Right before she pulled the blanket up to tuck around them and her, she raised a hand and pointed.

“What?” Lois asked and turned to see what she was referring to.

It was the open doorway.

Lois regarded the woman who was now all snuggled down with her dolls and her eyes were closed. “Molly?”

The woman nodded ever so slightly.

Lois smiled and told her, “Sweet dreams.”

She left her and ventured out into the hall only to be startled by a tall woman in a nightgown leaning against the wall.

“Who are you?” the woman about seventy-five years of age whispered.

“Lois. Who are you?”

The woman darted her eyes right and left. “You didn't see me.” She moved with her back still against the wall and silently slipped into an open patient door. From that room a startle was shouted out.

Lois giggled and continued on across the hall into Room Twenty to find Molly.

Chapter Four

Turtles and Baseball

“Sofia, I can’t find Velma.” Jolene stated as she approached the doorway. Right after she passed by Room Seventeen and entered Eighteen, a very stealth little girl named Lois pushed a wheelchair with a stuffed rabbit sitting in it down the hall toward Room Twenty.

Jolene stopped in her tracks and took the whole room in. She had only seen it in the dark. Now blazing bright from the ceiling lights, there were wall to wall posters of Boston Red Sox players and Fenway Park. Red and white colors were everywhere! Even the bed sported a BoSox comforter and pillowcases.

Sofia, the Nursing Assistant in the cheery scrub top and pastel pants, and with a wonderful head of dark curls, remarked back, “Check the shadows.”

“Baseball!” the man in his sixties of age blurted out. He was staring out the large window at the darkness beyond.

With her curiosity on the man dressed in Red Sox themed pajamas, she asked, “The shadows?”

“Baseball!” he yelled again.

Sofia placed her hand on his thick arm. “Come on Jimmy, time for bed.” She turned to Jolene. “She thinks she is some kind of spider or ninja or something. Always lurking about in the corners and shadows. Don’t worry, she will get tired and go to bed. I have my own problem to deal with.”

“Baseball!” Jimmy yelled.

Jolene moved to the other side of him and studied his face that was very beefy, with

deep folds and scarred from extensive old acne eruptions. His skin was ruddy in color. His lips were large and folded out causing him to drool a bit.

He suddenly shifted his attention to her and said, "Baseball."

Jolene smiled kindly on him. "Is it out there?"

Now that he had stopped shouting, Sofia applied a gentle firmness to pull him away from the window and toward the bed. "Come on big guy, time for bed."

He whispered as he lay down, "Baseball"

"Would you get the light?" Sofia asked her.

Jolene moved back to the door and pushed down on the switch. The room returned to nighttime mode. As she watched Sofia tuck the blankets under his square chin Lois passed behind her pushing a tiny hunched over woman in a wheelchair down the hall toward Room Ten.

Satisfied he would go to sleep, Sofia joined Jolene at the door. With a head gesture she signaled to her they were to leave.

Once they were in the partially lit hallway, Sofia who was the same age as her, remarked, "There is no baseball outside."

They started walking toward the community room and the well lit Nurses Station.

"Why does he say it?"

She shrugged. "No one knows. I guess someone along the way thought he liked baseball. He is one of the Stateys."

They walked around the raised counter to reach the desk area on the other side. At the back of the Nurses Station were file cabinets, the locked door to the medicine room, and another to the procedure and supply room.

"Statey?" Jolene inquired and settled upon one of the rolling desk chairs.

Sofia plopped down in the other and reached into her pocket to pull out a granola bar. "When the State Hospital closed, those who couldn't live in group homes, or who didn't have family, were shuffled off to different places. Eventually this place got about ten. Jimmy was one of them. No family. No one visits. I heard he was put in the State Hospital when he was a kid. Damaged at birth or something."

“How sad.”

“Yep. He is sweet for the most part, but then there are times he gets all riled up and starts shouting baseball.”

“Just that?”

“Yep. Very annoying.”

Being pulled into a deep thought, Jolene softly commented, “He seemed to be looking for something and getting anxious over that.”

Sofia rolled her eyes. “Don’t even go there. People have been trying to solve that mystery for years. He is pretty much non-verbal so he can’t explain.” A grin formed on her face. “So what pale guy did you hook up with to create Lois? Or is she adopted?”

“She is mine.” This was not the first time she was asked this. “There are some light skinned people in my family.”

Sofia waved the remains of her granola bar at her. “They would have to be albinos!” She stood up and stretched. “Well, Boss, they are all asleep. I am going to find me a comfy geri chair.”

Jolene didn’t respond. She was back in thoughts.

The minute Lois rolled the hunched over Molly into Room Ten, the last room on the right, lit only by the hall light, the matching little bent over woman in the bed struggled to sit up.

Lois removed the faded black and white picture from Molly’s arthritic hand and held it up so she could catch some of the light filtering in on it. She compared it to the woman in the bed. The picture was of giggling playful little girls. “I think we found you, Patty.”

Molly, with the innocent look of a child, leaned forward and reached out.

Trapped by the bedrails of her hospital bed, the other tried to reach for Molly’s hand. The two elderly women with short white hair, did look about the same age. They silently appealed to Lois.

“Now don’t go falling out.” Lois whispered.

While the women smiled on each other with tearing eyes, Lois did her best to unlatch

the side-rail so it would come down. Successful, Patty could bring her legs to dangle over the side and sit up. Only problem, she was very short and her feet didn't reach the floor.

"My dear, dear friend." Patty softly said, the tears now escaping.

Utilizing the fact the wheelchair was a special lightweight one, Molly placed her hands on the wheels and rolled herself closer so they could hold hands.

"Lois!" Jolene spoke out from the doorway. She flicked on the overhead light and rushed to the bedside. "What are you doing? She could fall."

The two women didn't acknowledge the new one in the room. They were too busy holding hands and smiling on each other.

"Look, Mommy." Lois waved the photo at her. "They were best friends and played together every day. Patty came here a month ago. Molly saw her on the stretcher when she arrived, then never saw her again because Molly can't walk and can't talk to tell anyone."

Standing alongside Patty to prevent her from falling, Jolene took the photo and looked at it. "How do you know this?"

Still looking at Molly, Patty answered, "Molly spoke to her heart."

Jolene raised her eyebrows in surprise on two accounts. One was due to what Patty said, and the other, that Patty had said it. "I didn't think anyone on this unit could speak."

"The medicine they give me during the day makes me groggy."

"Mommy, they want to play again."

Jolene whispered, "How? Neither of them can walk."

"I saw another little wheelchair in the empty room. I can go get it." And she ran out.

Jolene kindly addressed Patty, "Why are you on this wing? You should be over on the other one where they have more activities."

"Something told me to come here while I wait to die from this horrid cancer. Now I know why." She reached over and cupped her friend's cheek with her hand. "It was to take care of Molly. Poor Dear."

Jolene whispered, "Alzheimer's."

Lois returned with the same kind of lightweight smaller wheelchair.

That distraction made Jolene shift thoughts. "How did you get Molly into her chair?"

"Velma helped me."

"The Ninja." Jolene muttered. Giving in, she moved Molly's chair back so she could bring the other wheelchair next to the bed. After locking the breaks, she asked, "You sure you want to do this? Are you in pain?"

"I'm fine." Patty assured her.

With a careful supported stand and pivot maneuver, Jolene placed Patty in the wheelchair. She tucked a blanket around her short legs and waist. "Now what?"

Patty's whole face lit up. She told Molly who was also grinning, "You can have to the count of ten before I am come looking for you."

Molly nodded she understood, and with a few back and forth moves, she got her wheelchair turned around and was heading out the door as Patty counted out loud. Lois ran after her and pulled Bunny out from behind her, which was easy, seeing Molly was bent over from her curved spine and humped back.

Down to the three count, Patty started to turn the wheels of her wheelchair to begin moving. She too had the curved over spine and a hump in her upper back.

Once she was out the door, Lois whispered to her mother, "They look like turtles."

Jolene couldn't help but smile. "Yes, they do. Slow moving, fun loving turtles."

They stepped out into the hall and watched the two "turtles" using the handrails that went the full length of the hall, pulling themselves along, chasing each other in slow motion. Once again, they were children, best friends, at play.

Starting down the hall, Mother told Daughter, "We need to get you to bed."

"Baseball!" was heard.

"Who is that Mommy?"

They came to the door for Room Eighteen. Jimmy was back at the window. The moon had risen and was casting a white glow on him.

"That is a sad soul."

Before Jolene could say anything more, Lois had entered the room and walked up to him. Fearing his looks would frighten her, Jolene tried to catch up to stop her.

Jimmy moved his focus from the window down to Lois. “Baseball.”

Jolene froze in her steps when she saw her daughter was not frightened. She was instead displaying a deeply moving expression. Against her better judgment, she decided to not interfere.

Said with sadness, Jimmy repeated the same word to Lois. “Baseball.”

The little girl raised her hand and wrapped it around the outside fingers of his thick rough hand. She looked deeply into his eyes. They stared at each other for a few minutes.

“What’s going on?” Sofia asked as she came in the door. “And why are those two riding around on wheelchairs at this hour?”

Jolene stiffened up and hushed her with a finger to her lips.

Sofia scowled at her, but didn’t move or say anything more because she noticed Jimmy and Lois.

Jimmy knelt down so he was eye level with Lois. His eyes began to fill with tears.

Sofia moved closer to Jolene and whispered, “I have never seen him cry! What is going on?”

“I don’t know.” Jolene honestly replied.

Tears began to drop out of Lois’s eyes and her mouth opened up into a sob. The trance was broken. She let go of Jimmy and ran into her mother’s arms.

Sofia went to Jimmy who had stood up and was staring at Lois. He had stopped crying. “What is going on?” she asked again.

Without prompting, Jimmy returned to his bed and covered himself up.

Carrying her daughter, Jolene left the room and went straight to the Nurses Station with Sofia on their heels. She sat down on the chair and hugged Lois.

“What’s wrong, Sweetie?” Jolene kissed the top of her head.

Safe in her mother’s arms and lap, Lois found her voice. “Jimmy lost his parents. He was little. It was a car crash. He was sitting in the backseat holding his baseball. It was a horrible accident. He didn’t understand what happened. He didn’t understand what happened to his parents. They were just gone, like his baseball when he woke up in the hospital. His whole world changed. He never saw them again. He thinks they ran away.”

Jolene and Sofia regarded each other with wide eyes, and Sofia managed to squeak out, “That’s why he says baseball!”

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Chapter Five

Awakening

Nestled in a small New England town, resembling a mini castle, is the Willow Library. There you will find Miss Moon behind her stacks of old leather bound books, and beneath her jungle of hanging plants. Many have sought her wisdom. Many destinies she has steered.

Quickly filling the wooden chair next to the large desk covered with many old books, Jolene told the little librarian of the Reference Room of the Willow Library in one full breath, “The woman I work with thinks Lois is a psychic! I asked her to keep quiet, but I am sure by now she has told her whole family.”

Dressed in a yellow dress covered in a leaf design, Miss Moon said back, “Well hello to you too Miss Jolene.”

“Sorry. Hello. And she is not doing well in school. Once again, the kids are unkind. Tell me, how does she know what she knows? Is she a psychic?” Jolene desperately asked.

Miss Moon offered her a sweet sympathetic smile. “She has a gift. I suppose, in a way you could call it being psychic. It is common with her ancestry. They are dream readers.”

Jolene straightened up and scowled. “What are you talking about?”

“Her natural father. It is his ancestry that gave her the gift.”

Jolene continued to scowl. “Great! I need to make better choices.” Her face relaxed into concern. “I’m worried about her. Not everything she learns about people are happy thoughts. She is too young to be exposed to their sorrow or misery. How do I turn her off?”

“You can’t turn her off.”

Jolene's whole posture melted. Her sad eyes landed on the pattern in the natural wood floor.

Miss Moon placed her hand on Jolene's arm. She whispered, "You are a wonderful and caring nurse and mother. You will help her sort through the visions and information she experiences."

Raising her eyes back to meet Miss Moon's, Jolene whispered back, "She has helped others. I just,"

"Worry? That's what mothers do. Stay the course with her. Protect her best you can. Most of all have faith in her." Perking up, "As for school, I think it is time she went to the Auntie Academy."

Happy the subject changed. "Private school? I can't afford that."

"All accepted children are there on full scholarship."

"Really? How come?"

"The Wynter Foundation pays for each student. In honor of their mother who home schooled them as children because they were considered different."

"Interesting. Accepted? By whom?"

Miss Moon leaned back and with a twinkle in her eye, "By me. And she is accepted!"

Jolene blinked. This was all becoming overwhelming.

"The good part is, they have before and after school care so you can go back to working days."

"That would be nice. Though I am committed for at least the next month's schedule to the weekend nights. Now who are these Aunties?"

Miss Moon waved her one hand that was adorned with many clunky jeweled rings in the air while the other searched out a pen and paper. "Not to worry. Wonderful women who are fantastic teachers and well versed in gifted children. I am going to give you the phone number of Claire Grateful. Her daughter attends and is about the same age as Lois. She will fill you in."

"That's not the real name is it? Auntie Academy?" Jolene cringed.

Miss Moon chuckled, "No. That's what the kids call it. They think of the teachers as

their Aunties. It has a lovely Gaelic name. Now you go and call Claire and then if you like the idea, pull Lois right away out of that school, spend some time together, and after Thanksgiving you start her up fresh.”

“I don’t want her falling behind.”

“She is a very bright girl and these teachers will have her up to speed and more in no time. Plus, she will feel safe and loved.”

“I like that.”

Miss Moon offered her a kind look. “Trust your gut and follow your convictions and everything is going to be fine.”

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To the right of the narrow road was a drop off to the fast moving stream that ran along side it. Its other bank rose up to a dense forest, just as it did on the other side of the road. The stream was in a gully. There were no homes or buildings in sight. There were no streetlamps lighting the darkness, only the headlights of Jolene’s car.

Sitting in the backseat Lois stared out at the trees that lined this road while holding Bunny. Those trees were now covered with a soft layer of snow. The first snowfall of the year. Beyond the car’s lights, the area was very dark, or maybe not. “Mommy!”

Startled, Lois yelled back, “What?”

“I think I saw lights moving around the trees.”

Jolene glanced at her in the rearview mirror. She really didn’t want to be distracted from driving. “Probably just a reflection.”

“It moved, then vanished.” Lois strained to look out the back window to see if it reappeared. “Can we come back here in the daylight? I want to see the stream and look around.”

“Sure.”

Coming up on the left was a sign that announced the arrival to the Nursing Home, seen only in daylight or by passing car lights. Jolene turned onto that road that immediately began climbing up the hill. A winding hill road she hated that was lined with

old stone walls.

“I hope they sanded.” she muttered and gripped the steering wheel tighter, avoiding as best she could thinking about the darkened woods that surrounded the road.

It was her second Friday as the Night Nurse. They now had a set routine: Car parked, porch crossed, door to Wing A buzzed opened, Lois and Bunny ducking into the library, and there was Nurse Anna, hands on her hips, glaring through her glasses at her.

“Well you sure have shook things up!” Anna announced in her usual gruff tone.

Jolene took a deep breath to help her cope with what ever was going to be said or would transpire this night. “Oh?” She walked forward and past Anna so she could put her jacket and bag away behind the counter of the Nurses Station.

Anna turned to face her. “Molly and Patty have been going up and down that hall all day for days, getting in everyone’s way.”

That made Jolene smile.

“Almost ran over the Director!”

“Oh, come on, they move at a snail’s pace!”

“Then there is Iris who wants a whole wardrobe for her new dolls. And what did you do to Jimmy? He has been quiet as a mouse.”

Jolene lifted the key lanyard from around Anna’s head. “Does he seem happier?”

Anna narrowed her dark eyes at her. “Well, I suppose yes.”

Jolene shrugged and headed for the medicine room door. “Don’t you want to leave?” She placed the key into the lock.

Change of shift duties completed, Anna left releasing Lois from her hiding place. She and Bunny joined her mother in the Nurses Station. “I think I am going to like Auntie School.”

Placing her stethoscope around her neck, Jolene responded, “I don’t know. Their school has a little restaurant and bookstore downstairs? And that odd garden? I feel like

its run by a coven of witches.”

Lois’s whole pale freckled face lit up. “Nice witches.”

Jolene nodded in agreement and rubbed the top of her daughter’s head. “As long as they don’t teach you to turn me into a toad. Now go and try and sleep.” She stepped away pushing her cart that held her blood pressure cuff, flashlight, notes, thermometer, gloves, dressings, and all the other items she might need for her first rounds checking on the patients.

Lois looked around the confined space that was the staff’s domain and noticed a large piece of paper hanging on the wall that listed all the room numbers and patient names. She read out loud, “Room One is Iris. Room Two, Velma.” Her eyes wandered to the right column. “Room Twenty, Molly. Room Nineteen, Joyce. Room Eighteen, Jimmy.” She stopped reading and went back to relook at the name Joyce. A smile grew on her face and she carried Bunny out of the Nurses Station.

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Chapter Six

Night Vision

“Lois, I thought I sent you to bed?” the young woman in the floral colored scrub top and white pants commented as she approached Room Nineteen.

Standing in that room’s doorway was the petite girl with pigtails, hugging her stuffed bunny. “Can I visit Joyce, Mommy?”

Jolene stood behind her and looked into the room that was only lit by a small wall outlet nightlight. “Come along. Let her sleep.”

Laying with her back to them was what appeared to be a tall woman hidden under the blankets. They couldn’t see that her eyes were open and she was staring at the window, peering out at the night sky through a small opening in the curtains. After a few moments, her eyes shifted, taking note the observers had left.

Pushing aside her blankets she climbed out of bed, and as she passed a darkened corner, she hissed, “Skat!” and continued onto her closet that was built into the wall.

Melting away from that corner was another tall older woman in a nightgown. On bare feet she silently slipped past the woman rummaging in the closet and went out the door.

The items found; a small sketchbook, pencils and an eraser, Joyce closed her closet door and the door to her room.

After pausing to watch Lois head back toward the library and her bed, Jolene found herself now curious about the patient in Room Nineteen. Her rounds completed, which included dispersing medications and giving treatments, she headed back to the Nurses Station.

She was accustomed to medical records being in computer databases everywhere she

worked, but here they were still using paper files in binders. Taking Joyce's binder out of the bookcase, Jolene began reading: She was diagnosed as a schizophrenic in her early thirties when she was working at a government job. No details were given. Jolene searched back a few months to see her medication record and treatment. Like the patient Jimmy, she spoke few words during the daylight hours. She was known to have fits of clapping loudly and making nasty grunting noises. She was given anti-psychotics and other medications to keep her calm. Jolene frowned and remarked out loud, "Looks like they have kept you sleeping through life."

"Who you reading about?" Sophia asked as she entered the Nurse's Station.

"Room Nineteen, Joyce. I haven't seen her awake since I have started working here."

Sophia put her flashlight on the counter. "Good thing. I have heard from the day shift she can be quite the handful. She is one of the newer ones. Oh, and they are not even sure what her real name is. She was bounced around so much her old records were lost." She turned and started away. "Nap time for me."

Jolene didn't watch her leave. She was still studying the record. "I really don't like all the different meds they have had her on." she muttered to herself. "And I am not sure of that diagnosis."

Lois stepped back into Room Nineteen and looked all around. Joyce was nowhere to be seen. She went to leave until the thin sliver of light under the bathroom door caught her attention. She got down on all fours and laid her cheek on the cool floor in order to peek under. What she saw was Joyce in her nightgown sitting on the toilet bent over writing in a sketchbook. And Joyce saw her.

The woman with the tied back dark hair, thin face and nose, scowled and growled, "Whatcha want?"

Lois stood back up, turned the doorknob and entered the bathroom. She closed the door behind her. "I'm Lois."

Joyce continued to scowl. Her blue eyes dropped to Bunny in Lois's arms. "Whose that?"

Lois smiled and held it up. “Bunny.”

“Stupid name.” Joyce grumbled and went back to drawing.

Lois tucked Bunny back into her. She tried not to be hurt. “That’s what she told me she wanted to be called.”

Joyce glanced up. “And stop glowing. You will attract attention.”

The little girl held her hand out in front of herself and inspected it. “I am?”

Flicking her pencil toward her, “Now get out. I don’t want anyone finding me.”

Rising onto her tiptoes hoping to get a better look, Lois asked, “What are you drawing?”

Joyce gruffly replied, “Stuff in my head. Have to get it out before they make me go dumb again.”

“That sounds horrible. Who does that to you?”

Joyce looked straight at Lois and narrowed her eyes. “I knew too much so they shut me up. Now scram!”

Not frightened, Lois lifted up the long nylon necklace she wore. On the end was a small LED light in the shape of a lipstick. “Use this under the covers so you don’t have to hide in here.”

Joyce regarded it, but made no move to take it.

“I’ll leave it here. Good Night.” Lois cheerfully said, turned, and went out the door.

When Lois stepped out into the hall there was Velma smiling down on her. “I know where the day shift hides cookies.” And off the two went.

Joyce stared at the little light as it swung back and forth dangling from the doorknob. She scrunched up her face. “Stupid name. Stupid kid.” Moving her attention back to her drawing she concentrated on adding a new detail to the front view of an elaborately decorated building. That completed, her attention was stolen again by the toy flashlight. She bent over, reached out, and snatched it.

Knowing, as did most of the patients, when Sophia and her mother would do their next bed checks, Lois returned to the library to quickly get under the covers of the sofa made

into a make shift bed. She placed Bunny beside her and made sure the last of the chocolate chip cookie she was eating was swallowed. Sure enough, she heard the soft steps of her mother's white sneakers coming closer, then the lighting of the ceiling over her head. Her mother never pointed the flashlight directly on the patients. That would wake them. Instead, she used the reflective properties of the white ceilings to carefully light the rooms. Lois closed her eyes shut and pretended to be sleeping. When she sensed her mother starting to withdraw the light, Lois peeked. The beam came down off the ceiling and for a moment traveled across a far wall before it was extinguished. What it illuminated in that brief time made Lois smile.

Making sure her mother had stepped away, Lois jumped out of the bed and hurried over to that dark bookcase and inspected the clear storage box. It was full of colored pencils.

Joyce grumbled from under the covers. She had made a tent like effect to keep her head covered, allowing her to lay on her side so she could continue to draw. The little flashlight was propped up on her pillow and pointed at her paper. The cause of her verbal annoyance lifted the blanket slightly and smiled in at her.

"I have something for you." Lois informed her. She slipped the box in.

Joyce's anger vanished. She just stared at the box. "I'm not allowed to have pencils."

Lois pouted. "Why not?"

"Sharp points." Joyce simply responded, her eyes never leaving the variety of colors.

"Should I take them back?"

Joyce scooped them closer to her. "No. Now go away."

"Bye" Lois let down the blanket hiding Joyce away. She turned to leave.

The tent flap lifted up and the hidden glowing world was made visible again. "Bring paper next time." and then it was closed.

Lois opened her eyes and stretched. Morning light was attempting to reach her room from the windows across the hall.

“Come on sleepy head, I need you to get up and get dressed right away.” Jolene stood over her. “I want to talk to the day shift manger about something. Sofia has promised to walk you to the kitchen and set you up with breakfast.”

Lois was given no time to protest. Her mother rushed out of the room.

Giving in, Lois sat up and prepared to make her bed and get dressed. That was when she noticed the piece of paper tucked in behind her pillow. She lifted it out and unfolded it. Before her was a very detailed sketch of Bunny, down to the stitched seams, standing in a stone archway. Below the picture was a signature that said “Katherine.”

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Chapter Seven

Trapped

“Everyone is clean, comfortable, and settling in.” Sophia announced as she entered the Nurses Station. “And your Lois is helping Iris put her dolls to bed in that darling cradle.”

Without emotion Jolene responded, “Thank you. Oh, the cradle use to be hers.” She kept staring at the paper in her hands.

Noting the distraction, “What’s up Jo Jo?” Sophia asked while placing her clipboard and flashlight down on the counter.

With heaviness she responded, “They are not going to change Joyce’s medicine.”

“When you get on days you will convince them.”

“I hope so.” Attempting to shake herself out of her disappointment, Jolene abruptly stood up. “I think I will do Mr. Evan’s care early.”

“Need help re-positioning him?”

“I’m good. Thanks.” she replied and headed out to the patient rooms.

As always once you left the brightness of the Nurses Station, the rest of the unit took on a quiet dimness. This was the night shift after all and sleep was encouraged.

Nurse Jolene passed through the doorway of Room Five. Inside was a hospital bed occupied by a thin man who was un-moving. Pillows were placed around him in key spots to allow support.

She turned on the side table lamp waking up the room a bit, but not glaringly bright like the overhead light would have been. “Good evening, Sir.” she spoke in a quiet soft tone while opening the top drawer of a simple beige dresser.

The man in bed remained still. His eyes had weak looking lids that were almost closed, the eyes behind them appeared to be absent of personality, and his facial expression was fixed in a scowl. A thin white tube was coming out of his nose and taped

to the side of his face.

Jolene removed lotion from the drawer and brought it over to the bed. She continued to speak out loud, “Mr. Evans, I am here to exercise your limbs, and massage your back. We have to keep your skin nice and clean and healthy.” She made a pretend stern face. “There will be no bed sores on my shift.” After relaxing her face back to kindness, she gently started removing the pillows from his sides and placed him on his back in a semi reclining position. Keeping the top sheet covering his body to preserve warmth and his privacy, she gently uncovered his arm and began to passively exercise that limb. While doing so she inspected it’s condition and absently began to hum a tune.

Attracted to the music, Lois poked her head in the doorway of Room Five. She watched her mother care for Walter Evans. She made herself known. “What is wrong with him?” and took a step inside.

Jolene had given up shoeing her daughter off to bed. She never stayed there. “The simple response is that he is in a coma, like a deep sleep he can not wake from.” Moving to the other side of the bed to work on his other arm, Jolene paid more attention to his face. She whispered to him, “Why do you always look afraid or bothered? Do you have bad dreams?”

“Mommy, I think he does.” The little girl came in the room.

“That’s too bad.” Jolene stated and began to carefully uncurl each finger of his clinched hand. “Sweetie, could you go get me a couple clean washcloths out of that drawer? I am going to roll them up and put them in his hands.”

Holding Bunny against her chest, she went over to the open drawer her mother took the lotion out of. She spotted right away a small pile of old black and white photos. She lifted the top one out. It was of young men, just barely grown boys, in plain army uniforms, standing arm and arm and smiling. In front of them was a young boy about ten years of age. He was thin, his clothes torn and tattered, yet he was smiling. She slipped the photo between her and Bunny and picked out two folded washcloths, turned, and stared at the man. Her mother had rolled him over in her direction in order to start massaging his back. His half open eyes seemed to stare back at her. On slow steps she

approached the bed, keeping her eyes fixed on his. The closer she got, the more worried her face grew.

Jolene, humming away, glanced up and over at Lois. The girl was touching the man's arm and had a frightened expression. "Sweetie, what's wrong?"

Tears began falling from Lois's eyes that grew larger and more terrified.

Noting the connection, Jolene called out, "Stop touching him! Step back!"

Lois appeared locked in.

Jolene quickly tucked pillows behind Walter before rushing around the bed to pull her daughter away. At the same time Sophia came hurrying into the room.

"I heard you yell. What's going on?"

Jolene scooped Lois up into her arms. "Please re-position and tuck him in for me." And out the door they both went. As they moved down the hall she muttered, "Why did I bring you here?"

"Mommy, stop." Lois insisted.

Jolene paused in her walking and regarded her daughter.

"Mommy, I need to help him. He is trapped. I need to go back."

"No. You are too young for this."

With big sad eyes Lois responded, "I need to help him or I will have his nightmares, too."

Jolene's mouth opened up in shock. She gently put her daughter down and took her hand. "We can't have that." She looked up and down the hall desperately for an answer to come to her. "I should probably call that old lady Librarian."

"What's all the fuss?" a weak male voice came from the room they were standing next to. Room Two.

Mother and daughter looked into the darkness at the man sitting in a wheelchair next to his bed. Before Jolene could reply, Lois pulled away from her hold and went in. She approached the man who had passed his ninetieth birthday.

"What's got you all upset, Peanut?" he asked her with an annoyed voice.

Jolene joined them and commented, "You speak, too?"

He grumbled, "Of course I do. I just got nothing to say to those pestering docs and nurses on the day shift."

Jolene rolled her eyes.

"And stop calling me Mister this and Sir that. My name is Otis."

Lois removed the photo from behind Bunny and handed it to the man. "He is there."

With bumpy jointed fingers, Otis took it from her and waved for Jolene to put on the lamp next to his bed. Once she did that his weathered face and thin white hair was revealed along with the many dark age spots decorating his skin.

He took his glasses out of his shirt pocket and put them on. "Where did you get this?"

"Walter." Lois told him and moved right up next to his knees.

Jolene moved closer so she could look over his shoulder at the photo.

Otis stared deeply at the picture and the faces. "I thought I was the only veteran here."

Lois's face turned very sad. She whispered, "He is there, with them, but they are dying, and the boy."

Otis shifted his attention from the photo to her. Tears were running down her face.

"What is she talking about, Woman?"

Jolene knelt down and turned Lois to look at her. "Is that what he is dreaming about?"

Otis interrupted, "You talking about that stiff in room five?"

Jolene tossed him a disapproving look.

He huffed, "Well he is. They rolled him in stiff months ago and he hasn't changed. Now you telling me your kid here says he is dreaming about this? About the war?"

Between tears, Lois asked him, "Can you help him?"

"How?"

She got behind him and started pushing his wheelchair. "We have to go now. He needs us."

Befuddled and getting angry, Otis tried to twist and swat the girl. She dodged him and kept pushing, right past her Mom. "What the hell are you doing?" he demanded.

At a loss, Jolene just followed.

Once in the hall, a smiling Velma took over the pushing.

Otis had given up and tucked his arms into himself. “You in on this too you old sneaky bastard?”

“Shut up Old Man. Miss Lois just wants to help us.” Velma snapped back.

Jolene froze in her tracks and gawked. “You talk, too?”

Velma smiled wide and nodded.

Jolene threw up her hands and returned to the parade. “So much for this being a non verbal unit.”

As they started into the room, Lois suddenly stopped and touched Velma’s arm. “Would you go get Patty?” Velma nodded and hurried off.

Jolene asked, “Why?”

Lois’s pale freckled face shown in the light from the bedside lamp. “She was an Army Nurse and knows things.”

Jolene was rendered speechless on that.

“This is interesting.” Sophia remarked as the room suddenly filled up. “Someone care to explain?”

Otis was not going to be the one to respond. He edged his wheelchair with his feet to the bedside. Walter was now on his side facing the door and him. All sarcasm and hostility drained from him upon seeing the tortured face before him.

Feeling totally out of the loop, Jolene softly commented to Sophia, “I am not sure. I guess we just sit back and watch?” The two young women did just that. They moved over to the window. Sophia got comfortable on the sill and Jolene sat down in the chair.

Velma gently moved a very frail looking Patty in her wheelchair next to Otis. She was in a bathrobe and didn’t appear at all bothered by the nighttime mystery. She reached over and took Walter’s hand. “Poor, Dear.”

Lois placed Bunny on the bed next to Walter’s shoulder. “He is having a bad dream that does not end.”

Otis handed Patty the photograph.

She tipped the photo toward the light to get a better look. “I think I know his unit.” she

remarked astonished. “Suffered heavy losses. Many came home changed forever.” She raised her eyes to Walter. “They didn’t call it PTSD like they do now. Those young guys just came home, pushed back the pain, and got busy raising families and getting back to work. Easier to ignore the bad memories when your mind is busy.”

Jolene stood up and came closer. “I have seen that actually when I worked homecare. When the men became older and less active they would become depressed.”

Patty nodded in agreement. Her old eyes filled with pity. “I may have been close to the front and patched them up best we could, and held their hands as they cried for their Mommas as they painfully died,” Tears began forming and she looked over at Otis. “but I could not imagine the actual horrors they experienced losing best friends and watching others suffer.”

His eyes too were tearing and he tipped his head down so she would not see.

That did not deter her. She reached over with her other hand and placed it over his. Once a nurse, always a nurse. “You saw that?”

Sophia made a nervous sigh and quietly excused herself from the room. “I will go keep an eye on the rest of them.”

Jolene asked, “Patty, do you think that is his problem? He is caught in his bad memories and because his mind is damaged with the stroke, he can’t change the subject so to speak?”

That pulled Otis out of himself. “We can’t let him be tortured like that if that’s the case. Constantly remembering the bad and not the good.”

Patty’s face puzzled up. “How do we get through to him?”

“If I can take you to him, will you help him?” Lois’s sweet voice spoke up. She had climbed up on the bed by Walter’s head. “Only you, Patty.” She smiled at Otis. “You are too far from the curtain.”

Patty and Otis stared at her.

“The curtain?” Otis repeated.

In a most nonchalant way Lois explained, “The curtain you pass through before you die.”

“Lois!” Jolene gasped.

Patty clarified for Otis. “I have terminal cancer. Expect to go pretty soon.”

Otis scowled, “Maybe I am ready to go through that curtain, too. I am over due! Got no one left.”

“Not yet I guess says the glowing child.”

Otis chuckled, “You see that, too? Rather annoying, huh?” He leaned back in his chair. “Well Glow Worm, what are we suppose to do?”

Her face filled with a most tender look. “Dream.”

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Chapter Eight

Deep Layers

“Enough!” Jolene called out. She came round the hospital bed in Room Five and lifted her daughter Lois off it. “This has all gone too far.”

The elderly couple sitting in wheelchairs next to the bed frowned at her and before they could protest, she pulled her cell phone out of her uniform scrub top pocket and began searching for a number.

“I am going to call that odd little old woman and get some answers.” They stepped out into the long hall that held all the patient rooms to see Sophia at the other end.

“Jo Jo, there is a nurse wanting to come in. Says a Miss Moon sent her.” the Nursing Assistant called down to her.

Jolene looked at her phone. “How in the world?”

“Well?”

“Yes, let her in.” Jolene called back and started toward her.

By the time she reached the Nurses Station, the tall attractive young woman with green eyes and dark shoulder length hair was coming toward her. Her simple deep blue dress moved with her confident strides. She nodded a hello to her and then focused on Lois who was not as suspicious.

“Mommy, that is Miss Amber from the Auntie school.”

When her daughter said that, Jolene also recognized her. “How did you get here so fast? I just,”

“I was already on my way. Miss Moon called me an hour ago.” Amber explained and stepped right up to them. She looked down on Lois. “Seems she felt you were getting a

little bit over your head.”

Lois fidgeted a bit.

With stern kindness Amber told her, “We find it very honorable that you want to help these people, but you need to learn the proper way. Someone may get hurt otherwise.”

Jolene whispered, “Can you please explain what is going on?”

“First we need to do this.” Amber stepped inside the Nurses Station and up to a very curious Sophia who was sitting in her favorite rolling chair. “I think it is time for your nap.” Just as Sophia went to open her mouth to comment, Amber reached out and tapped her forehead. Sophia’s eyes closed and she relaxed down in the chair. Catching Jolene’s frightened look Amber quickly stated, “She is perfectly fine. She is sleeping.” She then dictated, “I need you to go close all the patient rooms except for Walter’s room. Only Otis and Patty will remain in that room. Velma must return to her room and stay there.”

Lois was already on the move.

Jolene remained, staring, concerned.

“I really am a Nurse Practitioner. I will not let anything happen to your patients or your child. I promise. It’s just we need professional help with this healing. Lois has meddled with forces she is not ready for. We need to put a band-aide so to speak on the situation. I can’t do that alone, and he can not be seen or remembered by those living here.”

Trying hard to relax, unable to, Jolene responded back, “He? A doctor?”

A proud smile crossed Amber’s face. “He is a Dream Reader and a protector of the night. He will help Lois with what she has seen, and help her heal them. Come, let’s get Walter ready.”

“Them? I thought just Walter,” Jolene got into step with the very quick Amber.

“Yes, we need to help Otis and Patty, too.” she replied while pulling closed the patient room doors they passed

“How do you know their names?” They had reached Room Five.

Amber gave her a shrug. “Miss Moon told me” and stepped inside.

A most curious Otis and Patty watched her step around Walter’s bed.

“Hello, my friends.” she simply stated and started to remove the pillows from around Walter’s still body.

Jolene joined her and told them, “She knows you can talk. She is here to help.”

The two remained quiet, watching the two nurses tend to Walter. His feeding tube was removed and he was placed in a comfortable reclining position. Their tasks done, Amber spoke out,

“We are ready.” and looked toward the doorway making everyone else do likewise.

On unheard steps, a thin man about late twenties to early thirties of age, wearing black pants and shirt, with a handsome narrow face, white blond hair tied back, very pale skin, and clear light blue eyes was seen. His appearance made everyone raise eyebrows and gawk. This was not any ordinary looking young man. And his attention was not on them, but the little girl who ran up to him and stopped at his feet.

Fearful of this stranger interacting with her daughter, Jolene moved to intercept.

“Well, Little One. You are exactly as they told me you would be.” the man said to her in a most tender way.

That slowed Jolene down and she held back a few paces.

Lois’s face was filled with wonder. She reached up and moved her hand close to his legs. “You glow, too.”

He chuckled, “I suppose I do to the right people.” He became very serious. “We are very special you and I. After you have been at the Auntie School for awhile, I will come visit you again. Tonight, I need to finish what you started.” He moved his head so he could look at her mother. “Hello Nurse Jolene. Fine Night Shift you run here.”

When those ice colored eyes landed on her, Jolene’s breath caught in her throat. This close she could see his pristine skin and feel his energy that she found both frightening and sexy at the same time. Working real hard to find her words, “And, you are?”

“Delano.” He stepped around her. “Now come on, we have a lot to do before sunrise. We will discuss your daughter’s sperm donor another time.”

Amber gave Jolene a little poke on her arm. “Amazing, isn’t he?”

Finally finding her breath, his words sunk in. “My sperm donor? You know who he

really was?”

“Another time. Come.”

Jolene’s expression became distressed. “I don’t know what is going on? What is all this glow talk? I don’t see that?” She faced Amber. “Please help me understand why Lois knows what she knows and who this guy is.”

Amber put her arm around Jolene’s shoulder. “When you come to the school with her, we will help you understand her better. Tonight I need you to reach down and be the wonderful nurse you are. You know this man is suffering and we are going to give him the best treatment possible.”

“Now, who the hell are you?” Otis snapped at Delano.

Patty was just staring with an opened mouth.

Lois climbed back up on the bed with the comatose Walter.

Delano moved to the other side of Walter’s bed and regarded him.

Otis would not give up. “I asked you, who is this pasty white guy?”

Jolene came alive. “He is here to help Walter.”

Otis continued to scowl and Patty to be dazed.

With a concerned look, Delano leaned down and studied Walter’s face.

Lois sat on the bed holding Bunny in one hand and gently rubbing Walter’s head with the other.

“Well?” Otis pushed.

For the first time Delano paid attention to him. His concerned look turned into kindness. “Just as the girl said, you and Patty need to dream now.”

Patty did not protest. She smiled on Delano and nodded it would be fine.

He said to her, “Your family will welcome you.”

She mouthed back to him, “Thank you.”

“Otis, Walter is going to need you when his mind is at rest. Please support him and be his friend. In return, he will help you heal some of your war memories.”

Amber walked past the wheelchair bound couple and touched their foreheads. Otis was in mid question when he instantly fell into slumber. Patty relaxed with a smile on her

face.

Without being told, Jolene pulled Otis's chair back and started making him comfortable.

Amber eased the now sleeping Patty into a more leaned over position so her arm would reach across the bed to Walter. She put their hands together. Giving Delano a slight bow of her head, she stepped back and eased Jolene and Otis close to the door and out of the way.

Delano turned off the side table lamp. The room melted into a dark shade of purple with the only light coming in the window from the moon. He whispered to Lois, "I know what you saw before was horrible and scary, so I want you to stay back. I will let no harm come to you, or to Patty, or to Walter. Please go out in the hall with your mother. Do you understand?"

"I like him. I want to help him."

"And you have. You heard his call for help. Without you he would be trapped in his nightmare for an eternity. Now let me take care of him."

Lois paused, staring at the pale man before her.

A gentle smile grew on his face and Delano replied, "No, Dear, I am not your father. Though I suspect one of my cousins is. We shall discuss that later with your mother."

With great effort, Lois relented to leave them alone. She slid off the bed and carried Bunny over to Jolene who had heard the conversation and was now the one staring in stunned silence.

Delano took a deep breath and started to place his hand on Walter's head. "Okay my friend, let us see what kind of torture your face tells me you are in." and he closed his eyes.

*

Chapter Nine

Final Shift

Every hospital, Nursing Home, or Rehabilitation Hospital assigns minimal staff to their night shifts. There may be a doctor sleeping elsewhere, or within a phone call's reach, but it is the Night Nurse who rules the shift and takes responsibility for the care and welfare of all her/his patients. The buck stops there, so to speak. And if you are that Nurse, you know the weight of that assignment.

That is exactly how Jolene felt about her patients. She took their care very serious, and that is why she was agonizing over letting this total stranger in and having him interact with her most vulnerable patient.

She stood in the hallway with her young daughter looking into the room and trying to decide if she should put an end to Delano and Amber's visit. At that moment, Walter, who was in a coma, made a verbal noise. It was a moan that was very sad and scared sounding. Protective Jolene instantly became defensive. She tensed up and started to move. Lois grabbed her hand.

"Mommy, please don't go in."

Jolene looked down on her daughter, conflicted.

Lois looked up at her with pleading eyes.

What broke the standoff was Delano speaking. Jolene held back and resumed being a secret spectator.

Tall thin pale Delano was standing next to the bed with his hand on Walter's forehead with his eyes closed. He moved his head in a swaying back and forth way. Through clenched teeth he said to Amber who stood quietly nearby, "He is a soldier in a small unit

moving down a narrow road. The buildings to the right and left are barely that. They all look bombed out. Every man has on a helmet and is carrying a rifle. They are nervous, tired, hungry.”

Jolene dropped her attention to Walter. There was movement for the first time under his eyelids, rapidly going back and forth. Now with Delano’s narration, she could imagine him scanning his surroundings in a heightened state of alert.

Delano continued with a more pressured speech, “They are keeping close together, looking into every dark corner. Walter is breathing heavy. His blood is pumping hard through every vein. Wait, what is that?” Delano paused and straightened up a little. “No, go back little boy!”

Jolene’s chest tightened and she drew in a fearful breath.

Delano flinched and his head jerked right and left. “Gunshots coming out of no where and everywhere! They have walked into an ambush!”

Jolene and Lois gasped.

Delano rapidly stated, “The men, Walter’s friends, they are falling. The boy. Have to make him get down. Running, shooting. Get to the boy.” Delano shuddered. “Hot, pain, so much pain. He can’t stand up.”

Jolene’s eyes filled with tears.

Lois held Bunny tighter.

Delano relaxed a bit and frowned deeply. “He is walking back on the road. He is back at the beginning. He is caught in a memory loop.”

Jolene whispered, “Oh my. Is that all he dreams about, over and over?”

Delano took a deep cleansing breath and let it out. He opened his clear blue eyes and looked at Amber. “Time to break this nightmarish existence.”

“The poor man.” Amber said back.

Delano regarded the elderly woman sleeping in the wheelchair beside the bed. Her upper body lay on the bed and her hand had been placed over Walter’s. “Army Nurse Lieutenant Patricia Crandall, time for your help.” Keeping his one hand on Walter’s head, he reached the other over to place it on top of Patty’s hand. He closed his eyes and

concentrated.

Lois whispered up to her mother, "He can't go into Walter's dream, but Patty can."

"How?"

Lois smiled on her. "Because she was there."

Trying hard to understand, Jolene responded back, "So she shares the same dream as him?"

Lois nodded. "Mr. Delano will remind Patty she cared for Walter."

Now it was Patty's eyes that began to move behind her closed lids.

Delano coached, "Connect to him. Pull him to you."

Still in her dream state, Patty softly spoke, "Corporal, can you hear me? Corporal Evans can you hear me? Walter?"

Delano told her, "Good, keep going."

Patty continued, "Corporal, you were shot and took a good hit on the head. Now you are healing just fine. There, open your eyes and look at me. Yes, you are safe. You are in an Army field hospital. The Captain fixed you up."

Lois whispered to her mother, "Patty will remember now."

"Walter, listen to me." Patty's voice interrupted her explanation. "Listen to me. You are safe. You will go home to your family. A boy? I don't know of any children. I can ask the medic and the Private who carried you out of the battle. They are just outside the tent."

Delano picked up the action, "She has left the tent to find a small group of young men smoking next to a beat up looking jeep ambulance." Still keeping his eyes closed, Delano smiled pleased. "Otis, he is there."

Patty was back to talking, "Walter, I talked to the Private who pulled you up from the muddy ground. Walter, he said a child was under you. The child was unhurt. You shielded him. Please, Walter, remember this. You saved that little boy's life." Her voice grew sad. "I'm sorry, Corporal, your friends are gone. You were the only one found alive except the child. It was an impossible situation. It is fine to cry. Yes, cry. Get it out. Hold my hand tight and cry."

“Well done, Patty.” Delano told her and opened his eyes. He tenderly regarded Walter. “Now you can rest, my friend.”

Jolene looked at Walter’s face. It was relaxed and his breathing became slow and deep. And there it was, a tear coming out of the corner of his eye, slipping down to the pillow. Upon seeing that, Jolene gasped again and lowered herself down to her knees for she lost all strength.

Lois hugged her about the neck and said into her ear. “His nightmare is gone.”

Jolene hugged her back. “Who is Delano?”

Lois whispered, “He is one of the Fair Ones. They can all read dreams.”

Jolene leaned back so she could look at Lois’s face. She cautiously stated, “You can read dreams.”

Lois innocently said back, “I guess I am a Fair One, too?”

“What’s going on? What did I miss?” Otis’s voice rang out.

Jolene untangled from Lois and was surprised to see the bedside table lamp back on, Delano nowhere to be seen, and the now awake Otis rolling his wheelchair closer to Patty who was ever slowly lifting her head up from the bed. Amber was listening with a stethoscope to Walter’s chest.

“I had the strangest dream.” Otis announced. “About my time in the war.”

Jolene stood up and hurried to Walter’s bedside so she could inspect his face. “Is he going to wake up?” she asked Amber.

“He is much more comfortable now. I’m sorry, I don’t think he is.”

With a very weak voice Patty told them, “I would like to go to Molly’s room and be with her.”

Jolene shifted her attention to her. The woman looked paler than usual, and her eyes lacked the normal spark.

Amber said to her, “Thank you, Patty.”

Patty rubbed Walter’s hand. “See you soon dear one.”

“Why don’t you take her to Molly and check on your patients. I will reposition Walter and fill Sophia in.”

Emotionally exhausted, Jolene nodded and pushed Patty's wheelchair out of the room. Lois stayed with Amber.

Out in the hall, Jolene could not resist. "Were you really in Walter's dream?" She opened up Room Twenty's door.

"Maybe he was in mine?" Patty smiled with what little energy she had left. "It was good to remember the comfort I gave my patients, and Walter. He was such a nice guy."

Otis commented after moving his chair closer to the bed, "Well, he sure looks less upset."

Lois blurted out, "You saved him."

"What?"

Afraid she said the wrong thing she timidly looked up at Amber who smiled back and nodded it was fine. Lois continued, "In the war. You found him and carried him to where he could be taken care of."

Otis furrowed his brow. "That's what I dreamed about. How did you know that?"

She smiled wide, "You saved their lives. You should talk to Walter about it."

Otis stared at her. Not sure how to respond.

"Anything interesting happen while I napped?" Sophia asked while entering the room.

Now uncomfortable, Otis rolled past her and left to go back to his own room.

"Nothing much." Amber replied tucking the last pillow behind Walter's back. "All is in good order and I am going to leave."

"He sure looks better."

"He does." Amber circled the bed and reached out her hand to Lois. "Walk me to the door." Lois took her hand.

When they walked past Room Twenty, they saw that Patty was lying next to Molly in her bed. They were smiling on each other and whispering secrets that best of friends can only share. Across the hall in Room One, Iris had her dolls snuggled about her as she slept. On sneaky steps, Velma passed them with cookies in her hand. She offered them a naughty smile. They walked on through the darkened community room to the short hall that led to the exit door. There they paused.

Lois's eyes became sad. "Patty is passing through the curtain before the next nightfall, isn't she?"

Amber knelt down in front of her. "Yes, she is. She goes with love and remembering all she accomplished on her mind, thanks to you."

"What about Molly? She will be sad and lonely."

"Sad, yes, not lonely. Patty has painted the path for her to follow, along with Iris, and Otis, and Walter. They are all ready to move on and can now go in peace." She leaned forward and kissed the top of the girl's head. "As Delano said, you are very special. As you grow older, you will help more and more people. I look forward to seeing you at Auntie School in a couple days so we can begin your education." She gracefully lifted back up to a stand. "Tell your mother good-bye for me. She is a very good nurse and mother." Offering a small wave, she opened the door and left the unit.

After going room to room checking on each and every patient, Jolene paused in the doorway to Walter's room. "What happened here tonight?" she whispered.

"Something marvelous." Velma said from behind her, startling Jolene.

Recovered, Jolene went to turn and speak to her. She was gone. That made her relax and chuckle, and notice that the sky outside Walter's window was pinking up. The sun was rising. Her shift would soon be over.



Sophia came out of another patient's room and commented, "Your last night shift. How's it feel?"

Jolene replied while looking up and down the halls. "I will miss the quiet, and I will

miss you.”

Sophia smile back. “I will miss you, too. Now remember all the good you promised to do when you got on the day shift.” She started back toward the Nurses Station. “Trust me, I will not miss the weird or odd that you and Lois brought.”

Jolene said under her breath, “I think weird and odd is going to be my life from now on.”

* * *

This is **The End** of the novella “**Sleep Medicine**”
by Archer Atwood,
though, not the end of Lois and Jolene’s story.

Author's Comments:

“When I started writing this story for my blog, the only idea I had for it was of a unique little girl who went to work with her nurse mother. It was fun letting the story spring forth and take me on its own path. Seriously, I had no idea where it would lead me. Or that in the end, I would be pulling characters from other “Willow’s Moon Song” books into it, yet it seemed very obvious on the day I was writing it, they should be.

The other fun part while writing “Sleep Medicine” was that it brought back memories of my experiences as a Registered Nurse and all the wonderful patients who I cared for. Each one taught me something new, or they prompted me to be more curious. One such patient was one of my very first patients. When I was a student in college, I had a clinical rotation at a State Hospital that is since closed. I saw a man there very much like “Jimmy”. There were no notes on him and he spent every day looking out the window saying the same word over and over. No one knew why. He couldn’t tell them. I would stand close to him and study his rugged face and wished I could see into his soul and find the answer. Every now and then he would glance at me, but there was no connection. It was like he checked out a long time ago. I hope he eventually found peace. He taught me we must always be compassionate and remain hopeful that some how we can help those who cannot help themselves.

Atwood

* * *

If you would like to comment on this story, please visit our **Archer Atwood Books** Facebook page and look for the album titled “Sleep Medicine”.

If you are interested in finding out more about Miss Moon, Delano, and Amber, please read the other stories in the *Willow’s Moon Song* series. This series is made up of stand alone books that are all connected. The characters “walk through” or have supporting roles in each other’s stories. Pay close attention to the “comet date” to clue you into the timeframe of that book. You will find Delano holds a main role in *Moonlit Meadow* and is also in *Rose House* as a teen, then again as a young adult in *Oak Ridge Shadows*. Amber has a small role in *Moonlit Meadow* and then gets involved with the naughty Jesse in *Jesse Monroe and Company*. Of course Miss Moon is in every book for she is the glue that binds them all together!

Willow's Moon Song

Stand on a hillside, bask in the moonlight and whisper your dreams.



Nestled in a small New England town resembling a mini castle, is the Willow Library. There you will find Miss Moon behind her stacks of old leather bound books and beneath her jungle of hanging plants. Many have sought her wisdom. Many destinies she has steered.