

Neighbors By Moon Light

“Knock, knock!” The unexpected voice from behind made me jump. Turning from my writing desk I noticed a woman I’d never seen before, standing in the doorway of my office. It was the last thing I expected. My cabin was one of only two houses on the rural cul-de-sac; both houses backed up against a lake, surrounded by trees. The other house appeared rather run down. I assumed it to be vacant. Solitude is the reason I bought the cabin. Yet in this out-of-the-way place I had an unexpected visitor.

She observed my look of surprise, and spoke first. “Howdy, Neighbor! Sorry to startle you. I’m Julie. I live next door. Thought I should stop by and say hello.”

“How ... did ... you ...”

“Get in?” She answered as if reading my mind. “I knocked and knocked, but apparently you didn’t hear me. I saw your lights, so I let myself in.”

“I thought I locked the door ...”

“Oh. Sorry, I didn’t notice.”

I snapped my laptop shut and stood to welcome her, not wanting to be rude to my neighbor. She was a good looking woman, around forty, ten years my junior. Her clothing appeared a little out of fashion. That, her lack of makeup, and her tomboyish body language said “country girl.” The red of the setting sun pouring through the window brought out the highlights in her auburn hair.

I always did my best writing in the evening, sometimes until well past midnight. But I was experiencing writers’ block, and actually welcomed the interruption.

“Well, hello,” I said as I motioned her to a chair. “I’m Mark. I thought that house was vacant. I’ve never seen anyone there.”

“I don’t get out much. My husband was killed five years ago. Car crash. Some drunk crossed the line. Guess I’ve become somewhat of a recluse. The time I spend outside, I’m on the dock behind the house.”

“That explains why I haven’t seen you. I can’t see your dock from my house. Too many trees. Sorry for your loss ...”

She smiled. “I noticed you’re alone too.”

“My wife passed away six months ago after suffering several years with cancer. I sold our big house in town and moved here for quiet and privacy. Uh– Sorry, I didn’t mean privacy from neighbors.”

“Yes you did, and don’t worry. I understand.” She paused as I squirmed in embarrassment. Then she continued. “You know, it’s been a long time since I’ve had the courage to visit anyone.”

Remembering my manners, I asked, “Can I get you anything? Coffee, tea? A drink? I think I have some brandy around somewhere ...”

“Oh, no, thank you. I just wanted someone to talk to.”

And talk we did. For hours that flew by like minutes. We talked about the weather, my writing, her love of books, flowers, fishing; anything that came up. Finally, as the moonlight gave way to the first blush of sunrise, she excused herself.

“Sunrise already. I must go. I always tend to overstay my welcome. And a writer needs sleep.”

“Coffee?” I asked. “I can whip up two quick cups ...”

“Oh, no thank you. I really must go,” she said, and stood to head for the door.

“Thank you for stopping by,” I said as I stood, and realized I meant it. “Come by any time. This is just an old novel I’ve been working on.”

“You must come out on the dock with me one of these evenings,” she said. “The moon is beautiful reflecting on the lake. You can see it deep in the water.”

I found her invitation tempting.

“Can I walk you home?” I said as she headed for the door.

“Thank you. That’s sweet, but please don’t bother. It’s only a few steps, and I enjoy the cool morning air. Now that I’m out I may wander a while. See you again tomorrow evening?”

“Any time. I’ll leave the door unlocked.”

She came by several times over the next two weeks; always just at sunset, and left just before sunrise. What a strange habit, I thought. *Why only at night?*

She answered my unasked question one evening. “Since I lost Frank, I feel more secure at night. I find darkness soft, warm, protective, and comforting. Like a favorite fuzzy blanket. I guess it’s just become a habit. Hope you don’t mind.”

I didn’t. Our time spent together quickly became the highlight of my day. She had changed my empty life by entering it. I imagined a romantic moonlit night on the lake would be quite enjoyable.

Two weeks after our first meeting, I drove to the small grocery and bait shop down the hill. I needed a few groceries, and thought I might find some small gift for Julie.

The man behind the counter smiled. “You’re new around here.”

“Yes,” I said, offering a hand shake. “I’m Mark. I just bought the little house on the cul-de-sac up at the lake. The one next to Julie Thomas—”

“Julie Thomas?”

“Yes. We met two weeks ago. Nice lady. She comes to visit occasionally in the evenings. Neighbors should get to know each other, don’t you think? I thought I might pick up a little gift for her.”

As I talked, the man’s face turned pale. “—Then you haven’t heard.”

“Heard? Heard what?”

“Why your house was so cheap. Five years ago, Julie and Frank were involved in a fiery car crash.”

“Yes. She told me about it.”

“Frank was killed. Julie was burned and badly disfigured. She couldn’t stand the way people stared at her grotesque face. She only came out at night.”

“Her face? I didn’t notice anything wrong—”

“Of course not. Did she invite you out on her dock?”

“Why, yes. Yes she did.”

“—And you were tempted.”

“As a matter of fact—”

“Julie was my sister. One moon-lit evening six months after Frank died, Julie dove off the end of her dock. She drowned herself in the lake.

Now she’s lonely and wants you to join her.”