

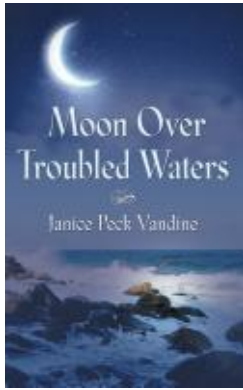


Moon Over Troubled Waters



Janice Peck Vandine





Angela Stone is moving back home after taking an extra semester of college, and has volunteered to shadow a troubled girl, a case her roommates are working with in a Psychology Clinic where they are interns. The girl gives her problems while she spends ten days over the Christmas holiday preparing for her wedding on New Year's Eve. Her husband-to-be has been called to assist an ailing pastor who becomes incapacitated, adding more stress...

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ISBN: 978-1-63491-269-3

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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2016

First Edition

Dedication

To Sam McCuin, whose spirituality has moved me and given me Christian songs of inspiration and to Ruth for her support of those endeavors.

Also to the Christian Country Singers for their beautiful music.

CHAPTER ONE

After a wait by her car, Angela Stone stomped across the sidewalk to the door of the apartment building and opened it. “Shake a leg, Madison.” Her voice echoed up the stairs. The sullen girl appeared and thumped down the steps. Her backpack banged against the wall. “I’ve been waiting twenty minutes. Noah’s plane is scheduled to land any minute.”

“Hold your water, Ange,” Madison grumbled, shook the snarls in her greasy, auburn hair, tossed her bag into the trunk of Angela’s red Toyota, and slammed the lid.

Angela tapped the top of the car with her fingers and watched her charge move in slow motion to open the car door, bounce down in the passengers seat, and fold the front of her faded denim jacket across her chest.

The wind pounded Angela’s back. She folded her arms across her blue down parka. She slipped the hood over her head and opened the car door as her fine blonde hair swirled into the air around her face. She slid in behind the wheel, closed the door and snapped her seatbelt.

After a glance into the rear view mirror, she pulled into the slush-covered roadway to head for the Berkeleyville airport.

“Looks like we’ll have a white Christmas this year. First time in four years.” Angela attempted a conversation with her passenger, who was to stay with her family for the Christmas holiday. “I’m glad Noah was able to fly into New Hampshire so I’d be able to pick him up.” Madison slumped down in the seat and stared out the window. It annoyed Angela that this girl had the nasty habit to ignore people who talked to her. Music blared out of the ear buds to her MP3 player.

“Mind if I turn on the radio?” Angela inquired. With a stop at the light at the intersection of Mountain Street and Evergreen Avenue, she watched wads of snow clusters fall from the long line of trees along the thoroughfare in front of her.

Angela had graduated from college, but returned to Berkeleyville University to take courses in Spiritual Medicine. She’d moved in with two friends for the fall semester and the final exam had been on Friday. She was moving back home and would continue her work as a nursing assistant at the Community Care Home in Wilson Grove.

Her roommates, Julie and Jeremy, were interns at a local psychology clinic and Madison, a troubled teen, was their first case. They’d become her legal guardians and Jeremy had searched the Internet to acquire a four-year scholarship to Berkeleyville University for her. It was for tuition only and money was tight so they’d moved her into their apartment where she’d slept on the

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couch until Angela would vacate the other bedroom at Christmas time.

Julie's parents had given the couple a ski package to Sundance Mountain Resort in Utah and they'd planned to refuse it. Angela decided they needed a break and volunteered to keep track of Madison. Now, she was on her way home to get ready for her wedding on New Year's Eve to her sweetheart of four and a half years. Angela was concerned the girl might ruin her family's holiday, but her mother had promised the family could make it work. Madison had no one. Her mother was incarcerated for stealing drugs from the pharmacy where she'd worked for six years and her father had committed suicide.

Madison wasn't easy to deal with and kept getting into trouble with members of her old gang. Twice they'd gotten her out of jail. Three times they had to have her promise the college she'd stop raising a ruckus in her classes.

A sixteen-passenger plane roared over the top of the car, nosed toward the ground and slid down the snowy runway. Angela squealed and checked her watch. "Touchdown. He's back. Noah's back."

"We Wish You a Merry Christmas" stopped in mid-sentence when Angela switched off the radio. Madison pulled a stick of gum out of her coat pocket, folded it into her mouth and smacked to the beat of the song on her ipod.

Noah had been working with the Methodist church in Wilson Grove and had taken four weeks off to travel to Virginia to close up his parents' house for the winter. He'd reported to his college in New York City for a final exam and was flying back in time for the wedding. His plan to do missionary work with his parents in Kenya had been tossed aside when a college professor offered him an assistance position at the Wilson Grove Methodist Church.

Angela had pushed her wedding date to Noah ahead four times. The last time, she slammed her fist on the table and vowed there would be no more cancellations. Noah thought New Year's Eve would be too hectic for everyone with holiday parties and traveling, but Angela thought it sounded like a romantic idea.

"It's an easy way for you to remember our anniversary," she'd explained to her future husband.

* * * *

Angela wheeled past rows of cars in the parking garage and pulled into a tight spot that appeared to be the only one available. A gust of wind whipped at the hood of her parka when she slipped from the car.

"Come on, Madison. We need to locate Noah."

"It's too cold for me to get out. Go by yourself. I'll stay here and listen to my music," Madison grumbled and slid down into the car's seat. Angela slipped the keys into her parka.

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“You can watch the snow blow around on the windshield. I’ve got the keys.” Angela slammed the car door, clicked her fob, and strutted to the elevator.

* * * *

Angela had met Noah when they were adult leaders at a weekend church event after she’d had a breakup with Pastor Maxwell Landry’s son, Derek. He’d come to town almost five years ago to visit his father and stopped Angela on the street to ask directions. After a whirlwind courtship, he’d learned his ex-girlfriend was pregnant and rushed back to California to marry her. Noah had been offered an internship at the church because Pastor Max had been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. He’d helped her get over the relationship with Derek.

* * * *

Angela searched the airport terminal and saw Noah exiting one of the runway gates. He ran toward her, his long, shaggy red hair bounced with each step and a smile lit up his face. Their arms locked together in a tight hug.

“I’m glad to be back. Four weeks is too long. I don’t want to leave you ever again. Will you be able to drop me off at the parsonage?”

“My mother tells me Pastor Max has visitors who will spend the holiday with him. Tony has the guest room at our house ready for you.”

"Has someone been watching out for Max while I was gone?"

"Mrs. Kimble took on that responsibility. I heard he isn't doing well."

"I knew it wasn't a good time to leave him alone."

"Mrs. Kimble hired a young girl from the Community Care Home to stay with him at night while you were away."

"That's a relief."

"I have Madison in my car."

"How did you win her? I thought she irritated you."

"I volunteered to bring her home with me so my roommates could join Julie's family in Utah over Christmas. You'll need to help manage her. She's rude, uncooperative and scares me. I've moved my things out of the apartment. They're in the trunk of my car."

The couple walked to the luggage area, grabbed Noah's suitcase on wheels, and headed for the parking garage.

"I can't believe you volunteered to watch her."

"Julie was afraid Madison would get into trouble while they were away."

"But, you're going to be busy with the wedding." Angela took Noah's hand and they slipped into the garage elevator. It moved to the fifth floor and they walked out and headed for the car.

Angela knocked hard on the window to get Madison's attention over her loud music. No response. She clicked the fob and opened the door. The girl rolled out and grabbed the top of the car's door.

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"I thought you were never coming back." She grumbled. "I was beginning to freeze."

"I told you to come with me. It wouldn't have seemed so long," Angela put her fists on her hips and stared. "My fiancé is going to sit next to me. You'll need to sit in the back seat."

"Sorry, Angela. I get car sick when I ride in the back," Madison informed her in a steady, lower-pitched voice.

"Doesn't matter. Noah's going to sit in front." Angela muttered, gritting her teeth. She opened the back door and the girl stumbled in.

Noah moved into the passenger's seat as Angie scooted around and slipped behind the steering wheel.

Angela turned the key in the ignition and looked into Noah's face. He leaned toward her. "I love you, Angela," he whispered. "How are plans for the wedding? In ten days, we'll be an old married couple? Still on, isn't it?"

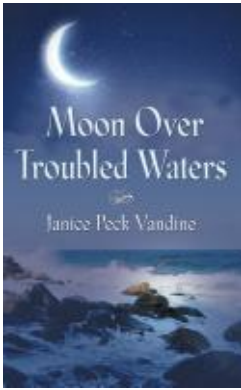
Angela shook her head enthusiastically and grinned. "Unless my mother has bagged it." She watched for Noah's reaction.

"I'm a lucky man. Your mother loves me."

As they traveled along Evergreen Drive, away from the airport terminal, the Douglas fir trees had gathered wet snow and big blotches hit the windshield with "splats." The car wove from side to side on the slush-covered road. Angela turned the radio on as they approached the covered bridge heading into Vermont. "*Over the River and Through the Woods to Grandmother's house we go,*" played through the speakers. Noah sang along with the music.

“It’s like the radio has mental telepathy,” Angela remarked as the car crawled along the road on the backside of the mountain toward Wilson Grove. “The white stuff’s early this year. It’s usually Christmas Day before we get the first snow.”

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