

The First Two Pages: “Hunter’s Moon”

by Robin Templeton

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For me, almost every story I write begins with the characters and their reactions to each other. Why do people do what they do? How do they respond to the unexpected? What choices do they make? What feelings do they have about those choices?

In “Hunter’s Moon,” I start with a fairly human reaction to when our life takes a downward turn. We all have fantasies about starting over, and frequently those fantasies involve a geographic cure. If we live in a polluted, overcrowded city, we fantasize about owning a bucolic farm or a seaside B&B. New York City is full of dreamers from small towns who believe that the Big Apple will transform them into bestselling authors or award-winning actors. And if something happens that deeply hurts or embarrasses us, we want to run away and lick our wounds. That’s a reaction we have in common with our animal friends.

My protagonist, Carolyn Holloway, has retreated to a Virginia mountain cabin to grieve the loss of her family and start a new life. Her daughter lives at college. Her husband ended their marriage to be with a younger woman. The story opens with Carolyn talking to Rupert, the family dog. He’s the only one left to

listen to her. It's a highly personal woman's story, so I've chosen a female, first-person narrator.

“It isn't almost heaven, Rupert, it *is* heaven.” And then to myself I added, “I hope.”

Rupert poked his nose through the cedar rails of our cabin balcony. I'd already taken my Irish setter for a chilly predawn romp, and now he was going to have to put off any further exploration until I'd finished my coffee. A mid-October Virginia sunrise over the Shenandoah River was not to be missed. Red and gold trees were on fire with the morning light, and a pine-scented westerly breeze mingled with the pleasure of sipping my favorite dark roasted brew.

Carolyn's idyllic morning, watching a perfect mountain sunrise, was written in deliberate juxtaposition to the story title. It's a lovely morning, but what will happen when the hunter's moon appears?

Even as Carolyn ruminates over the reversals in her life, the possibility of magic has been introduced. Rupert was named after the actor who played Ron Weasley in the Harry Potter movies. She's drinking her coffee out of her daughter's Hogwarts mug.

Clearing out our Arlington house had been the worst. Alimony and my part-time job as a librarian didn't provide enough money to hang onto the house. It took me over a year to sort through the belongings and the memories of a twenty-year marriage. Neither Mark nor Lindsey seemed to care about any of it. They had already moved on. Only Rupert was there to witness my constant anguish: what to keep, what to give away, what to sell—and what to burn.

But the next paragraph tells the reader that even though Carolyn is both nostalgic and wounded from her past, she wants to open herself to new possibilities.

I gave Rupert one last pat and picked up the coffee mug again. Lindsey had kept her drawing pens in it when she was a little girl. She no longer wanted the mug, but I did. I wanted the memory of my daughter transported by the magic of the J.K. Rowling books. And I desperately needed a little magic of my own.

“Come on, Rupert. The sun is up and I’m ready to explore.”

Carolyn’s travels take her to Raven Valley’s General Store. In Native American spirituality, the raven symbolizes magic. Although her conversation with the store owner is pleasant, Carolyn lets the reader know, “Keith wasn’t the kind of magic I was looking for.”

But at the end of the second page, something does attract Carolyn.

Next to the hair dye was a display of earrings unlike any I’d ever seen. They were made of copper and feathers and beads, but the designs were—I don’t know—almost otherworldly. As I rotated the display, each pair seemed more fascinating than the next. But one pair held my eyes.

The “otherworldly” earrings will introduce Carolyn to the unexpected events, to the magic, and to the resolve and the healing she needs. It will all occur on the day and the night of a hunter’s moon.

The hunter’s moon is a common name for one of the autumnal full moons. It’s the first full moon to follow the harvest moon. Animals and indigenous people are deeply connected to moon cycles for their survival. In modern culture, hunting

is most closely associated with males, but in both Greek and Roman mythology, it is a goddess who rules the moon, the hunt, nature, and the woodlands. She can talk to and control animals.

And with that, I hope that the readers find their own magic, their own healing and strength, and a satisfactory answer to the puzzle of what can happen under a hunter's moon.

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Robin Templeton is a Virginia-based writer who loves a good mystery. “The Knitter” appeared in *Chesapeake Crimes: Storm Warning*; “Out of Time” was selected for *Snowbound: Best New England Crime Stories*; “Ho‘oponopono” was chosen for *Malice Domestic 13: Murder Most Geographical*; and “Hunter’s Moon” appears in *Chesapeake Crimes: Furs, Feathers, and Felonies*. Robin’s experiences as a professional photographer and private investigator form the basis for *Fatal Focus*, which she hopes will be the first book of a series featuring photographer, Dare Andrews. Robin used the same characters for *Double Exposure*, which was awarded The William F. Deek-Malice Domestic Grant for Unpublished Writers. Both novels were finalists in Minotaur Books/Malice Domestic Best First Traditional Mystery Novel Competitions. Robin is a member of Mystery Writers of America and Sisters in Crime, and is currently serving as secretary for the Chessie Chapter of Sisters in Crime.