

THEATER REVIEW

The Pull of the Moon

By Nina Metz | Special to the Chicago Tribune
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The loneliness of marriage—of a life shared but too many thoughts left unspoken—is what drives Nan from her comfortable suburban existence. At 50, she is no longer an object of lust, no longer a mother to a small child, no longer a woman who knows her place in the world. So she runs away from home. "Well, here I am. Wherever I am," she announces at the outset of "The Pull of the Moon," a new play based on Elizabeth Berg's 1996 novel of the same name.

In a culture in which youth is valued above all else, Nan attempts to recraft her self-image—something she couldn't do with her husband nearby. It's hard to reflect and effect change when someone under your roof is reminding you of everything you once were—and everything you're not supposed to be.

All of which comes through with a warm sincerity in this production at 16th Street Theater in Berwyn, but a certain element of Berg's writing is missing. Specifically, the easy, unobtrusive wit that glides through her novels like silvered threads.

Berg, who lives in Oak Park, has been called the "writer next door," and it's an apt distillation of her style—conspiratorial and lacking pretension, with an eye for girlish detail, like the chintzy bars of soap Nan encounters in a cheap motel.

But in her adaptation of her work for the stage, her voice has become muted. Judy Blue plays Nan, and as directed by Kevin Christopher Fox, she is down to earth and believable but not terribly funny. Blue is the kind of actress who can sell a line like, "I forgot that I was one half of the couple that was us," with a straight face, yet she struggles to convey Nan's dark mirth and darker self-deprecation.

There is also the more universal problem of adapting a novel, which eliminates any opportunity to stop and absorb a mood or mull over the shifts in story. You have to do it in one go, and Nan's barely discernible transformation arrives with an awkward suddenness.

That said, the supporting cast is first rate, particularly Ed Flynn in multiple roles—memorably as a young stud putting the moves on Nan.