

# Full Moon Plus One

A short story by  
Mary Wildfire

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"Oh, crap," said Amanda, upon discovering first thing in the morning that she had started her period, two days early. Usually she enjoyed her day in the menstrual hut, but Tara had gone yesterday and Tara always took two days. Who would watch Pan and Oceana?

After a quick breakfast, Amanda dressed her children and took them down the path to Sheila's house.

"Sure, I'd be happy to look after 'em," said Sheila, somewhat to Amanda's surprise. "I may as well start practicing," she added, indicating her pregnant belly with a grin. What had suddenly changed her attitude toward her impending motherhood? Whatever it was, great! Amanda thanked her and handed over the bag she'd packed with a change of clothing for each kid, Amanda's bottle, and the crackers she'd baked for Pan yesterday.

"I'll be back in the morning," she said. "Or should I come back tonight? I could..."

"Well...Sheila hesitated. "How are they about going to sleep when you're not there? Do you think they'll fuss, or...or give me a hard time?"

"Probably not. Though this hasn't happened in a long time. Usually Tara takes them, of course, but she's in the hut herself today. I don't think it'll be a problem, though. Pan understands about the menstrual hut and Oceana takes her cue from him. If he's not fearful, she won't be."

"Okay, then. Stay until morning. You *are* supposed to spend at least one night each

month, as well as one day, in the hut. We do have to keep up our spiritual strength, after all, don't we?"

Goddess, Sheila could be so sanctimonious! Amanda snorted. She couldn't help it. "Spiritual strength' indeed! Spare me 'spiritual strength'!"

Sheila's smile disappeared. "Amanda! How can you say that? How can women be wise guides to society if we don't have spiritual strength? Or would you like to go back to the days when men ruled?"

Amanda shrugged. "I'm not sure that would be so bad. Look at us in this community. All the women meditate every month, we all dance the Eight Turns, we Bespeak each other's children; and yet I see women engaged in petty competition, acting mean, gossiping, acting like kids half the time!"

Sheila had her hands on her hips. "When was the last time we had a war?"

"Well...seventy years ago..."

"Yes. Just *before* the Changeover. Did we ever go three generations without a war when men were in charge?"

Amanda sighed. "You got me there, Sheila. I guess you're right. I just—I don't know, I see an icon, I gotta kick it over. It's how I am." No sense antagonizing Sheila, who was after all doing her a favor. Besides, she did have a point.

Five-year- old Pan gave his mother a quick hard hug, and then almost-two-year-old

Oceana bestowed some wet kisses. Then they followed Sheila into her house for their day of mutual discovery. Amanda hurried back up the path, past the house she shared with Tara and the kids—and sometimes their father—past Skyman’s tree-house, and then she crossed the creek and slipped through the fragrant, whispering pines. Droplets of morning dew brushed from their tips onto her clothes. On she walked, past the birthing hut—someone was in there. Who could it be? Nobody was due in November. Curiosity overcame respect for privacy; she peeked in the window.

Why, it was Janet! But she wasn’t due until mid-January! No doubt, though, of what she had seen. That was definitely Janet, and she was in hard labor. Amanda’s guts twisted. Poor Janet! She’d waited over a year to conceive, had been so ridiculously happy when she finally did...and what made it worse was that Andrew, along with most of the men, was on the deer hunt, so she wouldn’t have his support. Of course, he hadn’t suspected this might happen, so long before his wife was due.

Amanda was in turmoil as she slowly entered the menstrual hut and hung her sweat-shirt on a peg. Possibly Janet’s baby would survive, but it wasn’t likely. Meditations were supposed to be joyful, were supposed to see through minor problems and cyclic moods, to the sweet perfection at the core of life. But how could she see *this* in a joyful light?

She went on in to the main room and saw three women there. Besides Tara there was

Ahimsa who was past menopause but came to the menstrual hut whenever she felt the need, as was any woman's right; and Lavender, who was only thirteen. Amanda had never shared the hut with her before; she'd had her Womanhood Ceremony only this summer.

It was dark in the hut and the other woman didn't notice her expression. Tara asked, "Did you bring any spiritual work, Amanda? Who has the kids?"

"Sheila has the kids. No, I didn't get anything together, I wasn't expecting my period quite yet." Well, the moon was one day past full, so along with the others she'd be focusing on the Mother aspect. Often during that phase she'd work on problems in her own literal motherhood, but she and the kids had been getting along fine lately.

Then she remembered. "I saw Janet in the birthing hut, in hard labor," she told them, ending with a sob. She didn't try to suppress it; everyone knew that hiding or suppressing emotion only hindered meditation.

Tara and Ahimsa exclaimed with dismay. Lavender looked confused; probably she didn't understand the implications of a seventh-month birth. Ahimsa explained. There was a long silence.

"Well," Tara ventured, "I was just about to suggest a sweat, now that there are four of us. I don't see that this changes anything. What do you all think?"

Everyone seemed glad to have concrete work to do. It wasn't long before the fire out

back was roaring. The rocks were already in it. A short distance away, the sweat lodge stood on the edge of a little pond. Amanda went to fix the blankets over the bent sapling and grapevine frame while the others tended the fire. She was startled by a splash. Widening ripples showed where a frog had jumped into the pond. They were out late this year. As the ripples faded away, the brownish water reflected the feathery tops of mostly-bare trees...until Amanda disturbed the surface, filling the water bucket. She stared into the water, looking at the patterns...

And here was Tara, already bringing the first two red-hot rocks on a shovel blade. Amanda held the door-flap aside so she could drop the rocks into the pit in the middle of the dirt floor. When Ahimsa arrived with the next one, she was already naked, and so was Tara when she came with the fourth. Amanda went back to the hut to leave her clothes on a bench. Lavender was sitting there, still dressed.

"I volunteered to watch the fire first," she said, shyly.

Amanda smiled encouragingly. "All right, but you know, it doesn't really have to be watched constantly. It's in a safe place and there's no wind. So why don't you join us as soon as the next couple of rocks are ready?"

"Okay!" Lavender flashed a girlish grin. Amanda felt warmed as she went back to the sweat lodge. Tara and Ahimsa were already inside. This could be a good meditation, Amanda thought, with Lavender to represent

the Maiden, herself and Tara the Mother, and Ahimsa the Crone. And Tara, who was not a flesh mother, could also be the Dark Other...she crawled through the flap-doorway into the dark hot hemisphere. At first she could see nothing, but she could hear Tara and Ahimsa moving to make room for her. Now she could see the reddish glow of the rocks in the central pit. And a small bright triangle of light where she hadn't quite closed the flap; she fixed it.

Breathing in the steamy air, Amanda closed her eyes. She smelled sage, traditionally the first herb thrown onto the rocks and symbolic of both wisdom and health; also rose petals, probably added by Tara who was always looking for romantic love. She settled herself comfortably on the hard-packed, slightly damp clay earth.

There was a splash, followed instantly by a burst of steam. My, wasn't it hot enough in here? Someone was certainly eager. Amanda felt she could hardly breathe.

"Why don't we begin a chant?" It was Ahimsa's voice. Maybe she was the eager one. Amanda had assumed it was Tara, who loved heat when she was on her period. Her hands were grasped on either side, and the three women had just begun the Grandfather chant when Lavender called from outside. Amanda held open the flap, revealing a dazzling block of light, into which was inserted the shove blade bearing two nearly translucent, fiery red rocks. Lavender emptied them onto the other rocks, and while she put away the shovel Amanda



scuttled over to make room for her.

As soon as the teenager was settled, they began the Grandfather chant again. There was a period of silence when it was over, punctuated when someone again splashed the rocks and another wave of steam filled the lodge. This time Amanda wasn't overwhelmed by it.

Tara had them do an exercise in which each in turn threw something symbolically into the fire-pit to be consumed. Without thinking, Amanda said "anxiety" when it was her turn, and then she wondered: what had she to be anxious about?

Janet. Poor Janet, struggling so hard only yards away, for what would probably be heart-break. There was hope; if the baby lived, the doctor and midwives would give it the best care they could. But the odds weren't good. Well, she'd thrown anxiety away, hadn't she? She tried to feel it dissipating. Going, gone...she closed her eyes, thus didn't see the sparkle of another herb hitting the rocks, but she smelled the pungent result. What was it? Familiar, but she couldn't name it. Something rather sweet, but not a culinary herb, she didn't think. Maybe something wild. She wondered what it symbolized.

She could have asked, but she felt a reluctance to speak now. She was entering a light trance. A feeling of peace settled over her. She took the hands of the women on either side as Ahimsa began singing softly. Energy flowed counter-clockwise through the hands around the circle, now surging faster and stron-

ger. Amanda did not impede the flow, nor did any of the others. Within Amanda, something was rising.

She was conscious of the Circle of Four, of the four directions, of the clay soil beneath her buttocks. Though the moon was not overhead and she could not see the sky, she could see it in her mind's eye: one day past full. In the middle of the Mother phase, as she was herself in the cycle of life.

Ah, that's what it was that was coming over her: the Mother. She understood now; it was for Janet. If the child died, Janet would need Mother-love. Of course she would get some comfort from Andrew, who was a good man, and would give him some—but Janet would need more. So Amanda was taking on the Mother, as water seeps into a clay pot. Flesh mother she was to Pan and Oceana, but she could do more. She was strong.

That surging energy was gone now, she noticed. She felt only a great sense of peace. "I will go tend the fire now," she said quietly, and when Lavender had made room she crawled out into the November day.