

# **Full Moon Frenzy**

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# **Full Moon Frenzy**

## **Introduction**

You know, I've always loved St. Patrick's Day. It provides a perfect illustration for the values Irish kids like me developed growing up. The holiday honors the life of an extraordinary man of God by transforming his accomplishments into a bacchanalia where everybody gets knee-walking drunk.

What other ethnic group has done something like this? If nothing else, it shows how creative the Irish are. In fact, the celebration makes the Irish so envied millions dress in green each March 17<sup>th</sup> and pretend to be one of us. It provides others with a perfect excuse to get wasted, which everybody knows is the favorite pastime of the Irish.

But St. Patrick's Day isn't the only occasion the Irish use to imbibe. Take the death of my father in 1977, for instance. He was the only one who didn't get drunk at his wake, and that's the God's truth. Having grown up in an Irish-Catholic home in Boston, I learned at an early age drinking was an anticipated part of every social gathering, whether secular or sacred. Regardless of the occasion—be it a birthday party, Christmas dinner, or a child's Confirmation—without exception, alcohol was present.

As a child, I used to take a sip out of my dad's glass regularly, but drinking wasn't all I learned from my dad. I also learned to tell stories—just like him. I listened with amazement to his lewd prevarications long before I developed the skill myself.

When he got going, people were mesmerized and laughed uproariously, when he delivered the punch line. Upon finishing, his audience would fill up their glasses and return for the next round, repeating the cycle late into the evening.

I loved this bawdy lifestyle and pursued it for a long time—that is, until it finally caught up with me. That's when I finally admitted I was an alcoholic. When I stopped drinking, which was more than two decades ago, I not only gave up alcohol but most of its accompanying lifestyle. What I didn't give up, however, was story telling. Like my dad, it has become part of my personality—something that came to me as naturally as breathing.

This brings me to the story I am about to tell. It's about some folks I met in Alcoholics Anonymous several years ago. Although drinking was definitely part of their story, it isn't the main focus of this narrative. You see, their story also involves a

mystery. By the way, if you're wondering if the story is true, let me just say this: being Irish, there's a lot of "blarney" in me. Enough said.

Now, let's get to it. The story begins on a Friday evening in the fall, when the moon was full, and Melissa Gordon walked out of her house, headed for work.

# Chapter 1

## *Everything Was in Order*

Walking outside, she breathed in the evening air that had just a hint of coolness—a pleasant change after so many hot, sticky summer nights. It was the first Friday in October and, as Melissa Gordon looked up, she noticed the full moon, which dampened her enthusiasm a bit. It meant the evening would be very busy at Peachtree Medical’s emergency room, located in the heart of Buckhead—the most affluent section of Atlanta.

Hastening her pace, she walked across her well-manicured yard in Alpharetta and opened the door to her Cadillac Escalade. It was as immaculate as the day she bought it, nearly three years earlier. She loved her SUV and believed it retained its new-car smell. That always made her smile. As she backed out of the driveway, she stopped for a second to take a glance at her surroundings. Her two-story brick home was perfectly nestled in her elegant yard—a yard that was as green as it had been in late spring, thanks to all the rain Atlanta accumulated that summer. She was pleased by what she saw. Everything was in order—an order meticulously created and maintained by her.

She loved the life she had fashioned for herself, as well as for her son Joseph, and she was determined to preserve everything exactly the way she wanted it.

By any definition, Melissa Gordon was a formidable woman. She kept her staff in line easily, insisting they do precisely what was expected of them. As the charge nurse in Atlanta’s third largest triage center, she ran the show, and everybody knew it. Although retaining the refined and elegant mannerisms of a Southern lady, Melissa was no shrinking violet. She was a “steel magnolia,” and few were willing to cross her. Those who did paid a heavy price for their effrontery.

Now divorced for six years from her narcissistic, verbally abusive husband, she actually thought about Dwayne for a moment that evening, as she sped toward the hospital. She didn’t think of him often. Such thoughts were always a downer.

She married Dwayne at twenty, when she was still quite young and naïve, becoming a mother at twenty-four, which she quickly realized was a mixed blessing. She loved her son, who became the most important person in her life the instant she held him for the first time. She named him Joseph, after the patriarch Jacob’s favorite son.

According to the biblical story, Joseph, along with his eleven brothers, became the twelve tribes of Israel. The name Melissa chose indicated the purpose and high expectations she held for her baby.

By having a child with Dwayne, she was forced to remain shackled to him for a decade longer than if had she been childless. It was a choice she made consciously. She stayed with Dwayne, despite his foul temper and scolding tongue, for the sake of her son and for fear of what people would say, especially people at church. Maintaining the appearance of having a perfect marriage was very important for Melissa, and she went to great lengths to maintain her carefully constructed facade. In her heart, she didn't love Dwayne, despite trying to convince everybody that she did, including herself.

Although Melissa had become a woman of stature, she certainly didn't begin that way. She was definitely a late bloomer. Somewhat shy and pudgy in high school and well on into her nursing school years at the University of Alabama, Melissa trimmed up nicely by the time Joseph became a toddler. Some women are just like that. By his eleventh birthday, when she was thirty-five, she had become a truly beautiful woman in every sense of the word, which also meant she had outgrown her husband. Dwayne loved that she was beautiful but bitterly resented other men noticing her. It was an affront to his insecure, jealous, and possessive nature—all of which fed into his abusiveness.

Now forty-one, when most of her peers were becoming flaccid and frumpy, Melissa still turned heads everywhere she went. Bright and well trained, she was far from one-dimensional. Her external beauty was augmented by a quiet, purposeful self-assurance that seemed to ooze out of every pore of her well-tanned, perfectly manicured body.

At 5' 7", she had an elegant ambiance that seemed perpetual. She always looked good, regardless of the occasion; despite how long or how hard she worked in stressful circumstances. She was always in control. With perfectly coifed light-brown shoulder-length hair—accented with blond hi-lights—her facial features were sharp and aristocratic, bestowing upon her a regal quality that was alluring and intriguing. Always in control, she often intimidated others, especially potential suitors.

Because she breast-fed Joseph until he was nearly a year old, she was flat chested, which was her one physical shortcoming. Within a month of her divorce, however, she

underwent breast augmentation that perfected her figure and made her the envy of women many years her junior. Best of all, she used her ex-husband's settlement money to pay for the enhancement. She knew this would infuriate him, but that's precisely what she wanted. For once, she had allowed bitter, spiteful emotions to motivate her actions. With the added benefit he would never be allowed to touch them again, she had enacted perfect revenge toward Dwayne for his abuse and philandering. Just thinking about it brought a bitter, joyful smile to her face—one she would never permit another human to witness.

Part of her didn't like harboring resentment. She knew it was wrong. Feeling guilty, she carefully camouflaged her feelings. Outwardly, she maintained the façade that she cared a great deal for her ex-husband and prayed for his restoration to the Lord daily, but she never did. It never even entered her mind. Like most hypocrites, she convinced nearly everybody of her altruistic motives.

She concealed her contempt well and never allowed anyone to know the real reason for the divorce, especially her ex-husband. Everybody thought that after years of conflict, she had finally reached a point where she was unwilling to continue, but that wasn't it at all. The real reason went much deeper.

Having quality values, she had remained faithful to Dwayne throughout their marriage, despite his consistent abusiveness, which was aimed at her but also impacted their son. Despite everything, she was committed to holding the marriage together. That all changed, however, when she went to see her gynecologist and was diagnosed with a nasty case of genital herpes—given to her by her profligate husband. That's how she learned he had been unfaithful.

He had given her an incurable, lifelong STD, which proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. His offense was so egregious and her mortification so complete, she never allowed him to touch her again. Neither did she confront him about it. She just couldn't. Verbalizing her situation, especially to him, would have made her far too vulnerable, so she chose to end their tumultuous marriage instead.

She refused to consider reconciliation, despite Dwayne's broken-hearted pleas for her to do so. His whining and blubbering did nothing but embitter and alienate her

further. Irreconcilable, she insisted upon a divorce, and that's precisely what she received.

With Dwayne out of the picture, she restored order to her life quickly, pouring herself into her work, her home, and especially into her son. Although she dated occasionally, she refrained from being intimate—not from lack of desire but from her steadfast refusal to disclose to a potential lover that she was “damaged goods.” Despite not having someone special in her life, things were progressing smoothly—at least most things.

Joseph, who was the delight of her life, had been a model child. The divorce didn't seem to impact him nearly as much as Melissa had feared it would. In fact, Joseph thrived in his father's absence.

To Dwayne, Joseph had always seemed to be an unwanted nuisance, which was something his son sensed. Kids always do. Consequently, Joseph clung to his mother. With her, he was always assured of being important, and he became a proverbial “mama's boy” in the process. He did everything she asked—just like any dutiful son would, which included embracing her legalistic faith. Now nearly eighteen, Joseph had grown to become a strong, muscular, and innocent young man. At 6' 2” and blessed with his mother's good looks and confidence, Joseph was a comely young man, which everybody seemed to notice except for him. He was much too controlled by Christian legalism to allow that.

His music was his only creative outlet, and he loved it with a passion. Like his father, Joseph had a musical ear and became a first-rate guitarist, playing regularly in the band with his church youth group. To please his mother, Joseph lived a life that was regimented, ordered, and virtuous, never deviating from the straight and narrow—not once. He never even considered it.

From the time of the divorce, which was about the time Joseph reached puberty, Melissa playfully repeated this rhyme to Joseph every day:

*We don't smoke, drink, cuss, or chew,  
And we never go out with girls who do.*

When she said this, she always laughed—so did Joseph—but that didn't mean it was a joke. She meant every word of it, which he knew, internalizing its restricting message unquestioningly.

Based on external behavior, it was quite obvious Joseph was Melissa's son and not Dwayne's. Because of this, Joseph continued to be the most rewarding part of her life. So far, he had not shown any of the brutish, philandering tendencies of his father, which was a relief and supremely gratifying to Melissa.

Nevertheless, as she drove to work that Friday evening, Melissa had a nagging prescience her well-ordered world was not running as smoothly as it appeared. As disturbing as her thoughts were, she had to put them out of her mind. Work required her full, undivided attention, especially when there was a full moon, which always spelled trouble in the ER.

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As Melissa turned into the parking lot reserved for ER staff, her countenance shrank appreciably. Grimacing, she counted five ambulances parked at the landing dock. Shaking her head in dismay at what awaited her, she parked hurriedly, sneaked a quick glance in the mirror to make certain her make-up was impeccable—which it always was—took a deep breath, and walked past the EMTs who were hustling back and forth, oblivious to her presence.

Swiping her security nametag at the entrance to the double doors, she left her tightly controlled private world and entered her work world. She wanted to control the ER as completely as she controlled her son, but she couldn't. The emergency room was chaotic more often than not—a place where bedlam reigned, but it was also the most exciting place on earth. Melissa loved it, and she was good at being in charge. Everybody respected her, including the doctors.

Despite this—even after fifteen years of nursing—she still had a knot in her stomach every time she stepped out of her world into the unknown domain of the ER. Like always, she wondered, *Will someone die tonight?* Because it was a full moon, she knew the answer but, because of her dogmatic beliefs, she wouldn't allow herself to

accept that a monthly nocturnal phenomenon could bring out the crazies. Nevertheless, she couldn't deny that's what happened every month—no matter what.