

Once Upon A Blue Moon

by Joseph Grant

Along the trash-strewn highway that is known as the California I-10, not quite the road to the setting sun; for that would be Route 66, which bears the unofficial title of the Road of the Manifest Destiny Shot to Hell, there stands an oak tree with a curved bow that few notice in their quest for exceeding the speed limit. The tree grew miraculously as all trees seem to do; from nowhere did this sapling spring, reaching towards its nurturing mother, the sun, in the summer of 1922, when all around was neither bland outlet store, franchised restaurant, fast food atrocity nor branch of a boring bank, but branches of glorious citrus trees as far as the eye could see; all the way to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the distance. Agriculture played a vital part in early 20th Century California as those who were not growing it and becoming rich overnight were picking it and staying poor every morning against the backdrop of the mighty palms that were shipped in from Iraq to demarcate the roads for the Model T's amid all that citrus and this certain oak tree was used as a meeting place for Carlos and the foreman's striking daughter, Beatrice. The foreman was an ornery fellow by the name of Ludlow, who was a hard-working, sun-hardened, son-of-a bitch who cared not for Carlos as a worker and cared even less for him as a man, but this did not stop Carlos from writing pretty Beatrice sonnets, wooing her under the blue moonlight against their tree that grew each day, as did their love, among the scattered orange crates. Having gotten wind of this "illicit" affair from his workers, Ludlow was fit to be tied and furthermore, wanted to put an end to this blossoming romance once and for all, for no lily white flower of his was going to be plucked by some dirty field worker, he cursed, but was already too late, Beatrice was pregnant. Enraged, Ludlow sent his daughter by train to his sister's the very evening she tearfully told him and drove recklessly throughout the acreage in search of Carlos, finally finding him waiting with a suitcase at their rendezvous point and incensed, rammed the young man with his Model T, killing him and leaving the tree traumatized, causing the bow to curve inwardly while it matured, as if for one final embrace, forever to bear witness to the beauty and tragedy that young love can sometimes bring.

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Paris, In the Rain

by Joseph Grant

You walk along the vacant, wind-swept streets with only the leaves racing around your feet. You try and forget the girl whom you loved with all of your heart but she never loved you quite the same. The café where you met her is now closed for the season; the owners have gone away to Menton for the lemon festival. Your empty footsteps echo all the way from Notre Dame des Champs to rue de Fleurus and you quicken your pace, trying to put more distance between you and your recent past, as the wind gusts colder now down the boulevard and the faces in the paintings have all changed. The skies grow more ominous and gray over the slate rooftops with no end to the winter sadness in sight, yet you walk on, caught in a Braque painting gone mad. But you take heart in what's left of yours; it's just Paris in the rain.

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One Step

by Joseph Grant

What separates us from breaking on thru to that other side but the thin veil of this fleeting life? We are but one step closer with every sunset to snuffing out that inner candle, shaking off this mortal coil, to seeing if there really is an afterlife or nothing at all and with each war, each 9/11, each stress-filled day where important paperwork must be processed only to end up useless in the end like on that certain September day, reminding us what is truly important is not found on a spreadsheet but in the people it represents. When this monotheistic image of children's theatre we call mankind finally eradicates himself from this blue marble by destroying it or himself, what will be the legacy of man? Greatness is within us, it is within our steps to recreate as many Renaissances as we want, personal or otherwise to reinvent Eden through art, literature, poetry and music and why just limit ourselves to one new Eden, but many? It is our choice to live each day to the fullest, keep the wolves from our door when necessary and focus on the positive and the loved ones around us and cherish each day as the gift from God that it truly is, all it takes is that pivotal first step. Or we can literally wind up as some galactic footnote to a future alien race wandering and wondering about the strange-shaped boot print left long ago upon the now-orphaned moon.

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The Pugilist Falls

by Joseph Grant

They're jerking your chain growled the sweaty, rotund man inconceivably named Jimmy Marbles who looked more at home spilling blood in a Mickey Spillane novel than spilling his guts to a reporter from The Post and he continued *don't believe a woid they says, get me, when's the last time you hoid of an honest cop*, he asked with a laugh. *Now me, I'm dyin' a cancer and if'n I get whacked see, then as far as I can figure, da boys are doin' me a favor, capiche* he said with a dead man's grin. *I tell ya, I had nothin' ta do wit' dat heist at LaGuardia last month and if da boys or da cops think I did den day can kiss my ass and search me* he said and grabbed a handful of peanuts from the bar. *Whoever did dat heist and screwed da Mob outta a cool twenty mill, not for nothin' but I hope to hell dey are dead cos if dey ain't, dey are gonna be pretty soon, believe you me* he said with the alacrity of man who had inside information, which he probably did, the reporter thought. Jimmy Marbles was a "money talks/bullshit walks", no-nonsense kind of guy that fixed Atlantic City for the Mob decades ago, but unbeknownst to him, they were onto him this time and since he was no longer paying off the police, they would not be parked outside of his Queens house when two young punks would blow his and his wife's brains out against the plastic-covered couch later that evening. *Doncha worry about me, Pete*, Jimmy gargled through a mouthful of half-eaten peanuts and looked at the tv just in time to catch a fighter hug the canvas, *I'm having the time of my life*.

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Ghost Rider (Redux)

by Joseph Grant

"Ah have been given / the / keys to the kingdom..." once sang legendary lead singer and front man of *Rimbaud*, Snake Monahan. As his balding, gray-haired ex-band mates practiced for a corporate-sponsored summer reunion tour of America with their latest embodiment of Snake reincarnate, in walked a very familiar *and up 'til then* very departed figure; that of Snake. Upon seeing this, the latest in a line of faux lead singers stopped in mid-song and fled the rehearsal in horror while the drummer fainted dead away, never believing he'd ever see Snake again in the flesh, especially after that nasty tome he had had ghostwritten as his own. Snake's saga had become the stuff of rock legend: struggling and devastatingly handsome model-turned Village poet and folk singer, rock star *enfant terrible*, junkie, burned out-icon, all by the age of 30 when he went missing in 1969, rumored most probably dead in the desert or OD'd in some cheap Hollywood flophouse, depending on whose story one believed. Biographers presumed he had forsaken the rich life of a hippie spokesperson for that of a Wall Street banker, others wrote he had been spotted in Zambia or Marrakesh, while some stated he had joined the CIA and had assumed a new identity and even if this were true, how would they have known? Some would promulgate internet theories that he had been abducted by a UFO, time-traveled or came back from the dead while his old band mates noticed he had not aged one day since he had vanished; whatever it was, Snake was certainly not saying, but, hell *was he pissed*.

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