

Twice in a Blue Moon

by Sam Cheever

A fat moon hung softly over a forgotten burial ground. Tall weeds and tender saplings danced a gentle waltz around fallen chunks of marble and toppled headstones. In the distance a night bird called and was answered in kind from a nearby tree. A nervous doe tiptoed softly past cracked markers, testing the air carefully and casting soft brown eyes in fear around the place of death.

The air was thick, unseasonably hot, and fat with tension.

The Blue Moon rarely falls on Halloween. Legend runs rife with stories of the horrors that have occurred on these rare occasions. Humans celebrate the blue moon as if it were a special party favor, provided for their amusement on this most spirit filled of holidays. Were they less dense to the ways of the spirit world, they would shun the Blue Moon on Halloween. And run shrieking from its notice.

But mankind's dense nature serves as soft cover for the night's inhabitants, particularly those who long ago left flesh behind and joined the realm of dark imaginings and abhorrent reality.

On this most unique of nights, the moon pulsed high above the Earth and those who lay beneath it gasped a long awaited phantom breath and fought to break free from their dirt and wood prisons. Skeletons far below the earth shuddered as their former occupants writhed and jerked in frantic escape.

Only those who had unfinished business were allowed to leave their hallowed prisons. One of these shot free from the earth and hovered high in the night sky, basking in the full light of the moon and gaining strength with its favor. His thoughts were scattered but a single idea kept playing itself across them.

Find her.

The house at 666 Wickesby Lane, which under normal conditions loomed over the quiet neighborhood by virtue of its size and resplendence, was even more the focus of attention on this night. Every window in the huge, stone structure radiated with light and the air around it pulsed with the sound of music and conversation.

The spirit floated through the rooms, leaving behind a trail of goose bumps and shivery flesh. His passage seemed to go unnoticed except for, here or there, the rubbing of exposed arms and the quick rising of hairs on a slender neck or a muscular arm.

Still he searched on. For her.

At one point, seeking refuge from the violence of the encroaching humanity in those crowded rooms, he moved beyond the largest room into the night air beyond, where the music softened into the background and the lighting consisted solely of a few strings of small lights, which left handy shadows in the corners and edges of the nearly deserted garden.

It was there that he saw her.

He recognized her slender form instantly. The life force that shone from her was dimmed and hesitant, as if it clung only tentatively to the physical plane. She stood with a morose air, just at the edge of the stone lined garden path, where a waist high fence of wood stopped the casual observer from plunging headlong into the raging surf below.

He moved toward her and reached a spectral hand forward. Longing suddenly to run his fingers across the softness of her skin, bury his face in the fragrant red-gold locks, and speak to her of the love he hadn't considered when he'd bargained with the Devil.

But she couldn't hear those words, couldn't feel his touch, and, he feared as he watched her move toward the white fence that stood between her and the sharp, black rocks below, she seemed to be beyond all thought of salvation.

He knew without speaking to her that she had lived life without love, her days filled with fear, and loss, and painful restraint. Sadness had been her constant companion and life had been her unbearable bondage. Like all those before her, she had been thrust onto her current path, an unwitting victim of events beyond her control, locked in misery that had no cure. The ugly trail of death had started with him and, he suddenly determined, would end with him this night.

It would end now. In this time. In this place. Under this Halloween Blue Moon.

He swung around as a young man emerged from the blinding illumination of the house. He recognized his own features with a sense of shock and his own debaucheries with an equal sense of shame. He didn't need to read the thoughts churning there or see with his own eyes the lust for riches and power that stained the young man. He'd started the putrid chain that had brought the young man to the place where he himself had once been.

Like the woman, the young man was a victim of the specter's mistakes. He walked the path others had laid for him, with no control over where the path led him or how he reacted to it. His past was filled also with tragedy, written in fate's cruel hand.

So many spoiled by the specter's debauched greed.

The specter watched the young man approach the woman. He watched her turn with hopeful eyes that collapsed against the hard, arrogant aspect of the young man's handsome face.

"So you've made your choice." To the specter, her voice was the only music the night needed. It brought memories of love and passion and youthful excitement to the cold, dead, monster between them.

The young man frowned at the censure in her sweet voice and took a step toward her, hands outstretched in supplication.

It was like a film of his life played out before his hazy eyes. The specter, deadened to emotion all these many years, felt the sudden need to sob and beg her forgiveness.

"I need to do this, Danika. For our future," Pled the young man.

She stepped away from him, a look of pure horror on her face. "I don't need her money. We..." she pointed between them with passion "...don't need her money. Don't do this thing."

The young man jerked his head in disgust. "She's nearly dead anyway, Danny. I'd just be hastening her death and giving her release." This concept, the specter remembered, gave the young man an idea for a possible bargaining point. "I feel so badly for her, Danny, she's in such terrible pain."

The young woman had turned away and was standing pressed against the white fence, her delicate hands clutching the top rail convulsively. She didn't return her gaze to his as she said, "No. She feels no pain like that you would give her with your treachery. I cannot live with what you've become, Alex. Leave me."

The young man's chest filled with a passion to persuade her to his way. He stepped toward her with reaching hands. The specter knew the next scene, had written it, in fact, in blood. And his mind cast about for something to do to stop what was about to happen.

The young woman stepped onto the fencing, her grey eyes cast in a resolute fashion toward her death below. The young man surged toward her, meaning to grab her off the fence, horror filling his arrogant, blue eyes. He reached her and she turned, pushing at his arms as he tried to grasp her.

The spirit flew at the young man, determined to pull him away but instead he found himself within flesh again, looking into the horror filled eyes of the woman he loved, as she began the backward spiral that would bring about her death...yet again.

It was his every nightmare brought to life. Filled with color and sound that scored his heart like a thousand razors. He screamed her name and flung himself upon her legs, grasping her about the ankles as her body plunged silently over the side of the cliff.

He felt concussion dull and wrenching, as her head connected hard with the rock wall of the cliff below the fence. Hot tears flowed down his face and he sobbed as he clutched frantically at her ankles, slippery from the silk coverings she wore under the period costume that exactly matched the dress she'd worn on this night one hundred years ago, in this very same garden, under an identical Blue Moon.

He sobbed her name over and over again as he struggled to pull her back over the railing. He felt her limp form sliding from his grasp and he knew he wouldn't be able to stop her fall.

Suddenly strong hands joined his and muscular arms wrapped around her legs, pulling with him to lever her silent and unresisting body back over the fence. Together he and the helpful partygoer laid her gently on the garden stones.

A dark pool of blood quickly gathered beneath her head.

Alex yanked off his coat and ripped a sleeve off one arm of his white dress shirt, wrapping it tightly around the wound on her head to staunch the horrifying flow of blood. Then he looked up to find all of

them standing there. The same concerned faces stared back at him from a hundred years ago as he sobbed quietly, knowing he was too late to save her...to stop the trail of death he'd started a century ago. Wondering if the cycle would ever end.

He bent over her still form and screamed his frustration, her name a constant prayer upon his lips.

Finally, a beautiful voice came to him in his head and he looked up to see an Angel hovering above him. The creature was nearly invisible beyond its painful aura of light. He squinted upward and raised his arms in supplication, "Save her, please!"

"Alex Phelps, you have chosen life and love over death and power?"

"I don't care what happens to me. Please! Just save her."

The Angel repeated the question. "Alex Phelps, you have chosen life and love over death and power?"

Alex lowered his head on a sob. "I have."

"You are ready to be judged?"

His whole body went taut with fear and dread. He knew he could weaken and fail again if he didn't pull all his resolve together and stand steadfast. He looked at Danika's pale face and felt resolve rising within his breast.

Slowly he stood up, his body trembling with the choice he had to make. "I am."

The Angel gave a single nod and raised its glorious arms to the sky. Immediately the entire garden was illuminated in a light and warmth so powerful it felt as if it must melt flesh and scorch the very rocks beneath their feet. As he stood under that healing light, he felt the souls of others flooding into him, each one creating another dimension to his personality that he only realized had been missing by its return. He turned to her and saw the shimmer of souls plunging into her frail body as well, causing her to jerk with each addition to her weakened form on the garden stones.

The light began to dim and the Angel flowed away from them, growing smaller as the distance between them deepened. The last sound he heard in his mind was the Angel's beautiful voice proclaiming his forgiveness.

"Alex Phelps your soul is healed and you have life again. Your choices from here forward will spell your fate. Guard them well."

Alex watched the Angel until it was out of sight and then continued to stare into the distance with a sense of wonder that made him numb. A soft hand on his arm brought him back with a jolt.

Danika stood beside him, smiling, her grey eyes filled with love. "Alex. Are you all right?"

He turned to her and smiled, her love completing him as no earthly treasure ever had. "I've never been better, my love." His lips descended on hers and their kiss rivaled the warmth of the Angel's healing

force. When they pulled apart, he felt, for the first time in a century, as if his soul and heart were truly healed. Love was his again. Life was simply an extra dimension to his happiness.

Clasping hands, they turned and left the garden together. They entered the bright and boisterous rooms with light hearts and calm souls. Ending forever the trail of death and pain they'd lived through many lives on this earth.

Above the garden, a fat moon pulsed with power and life, and spread its Halloween magic across the land.

In the forgotten cemetery, another spirit burst from the ground...