

The Hotel of Other-Worldly Delights

by James LePore (August 2016)



Grape Arbor, Tuscany, © James LePore

I wasn't on the side of the road long before a car pulled up behind me and a very pretty young man came over and asked me in perfect English if I needed help. The used Fiat that I had bought in Rome had overheated and would not go another foot. I nodded, yes I do. What kind of pictures do you take? he asked

me. He was leaning into the car from the passenger side window and had seen my Leica on the seat. He swept his silky blond hair away from his forehead as he said this. It was a hot day. On his forearm was a tattoo of a woman in a pale yellow gown dancing under a leafy awning dotted with white flowers. Pictures to take your breath away, I answered. He smiled and said he would send a tow truck.

The town was definitely not for tourists. It was two dusty streets, a corner trattoria and the garage where my car was being looked at. At least two days, Fredo the mechanic had said, maybe three. The car is old and a radiator will not be easy to find. I took my camera and knapsack and walked toward the setting sun to the Hotel of Other-Worldly Delights about a mile from town.

My room at the hotel looked across a wide lawn to a grape arbor. It was beautifully lit so I took a cup of tea laced with anisette out to my balcony and sat and sipped and took a few pictures. While I was doing this a couple came out of the shadows and began dancing under the arbor, a dark haired woman and a blond man. There was no music, except possibly in their souls because they danced as if they were born to it, flowing in and out of the shadows as if in tune with the night breeze. I took their picture as well.

I spent the next day wandering around the hills above the town. At the trattoria at lunch time, I saw a good-looking woman eating by herself. After I paid my bill, I walked over to her table. Excuse me, I said in my bad Italian, have we met? I speak English, she said. I'm not making a pass at you, I said, I honestly feel like we've met. No, she said, we haven't. Sorry, I said and turned to leave. Are you staying at the hotel? she said when I got to the door. I knew she was referring to my hotel because it was the only hotel for twenty miles and the people in town and at the hotel itself simply called it *the hotel*, or *The Other-Worldly*. Yes, I said, are you? No, she answered. She smiled and waved goodbye.

I wandered in the hills some more, and then stopped by the garage before heading back to the Other-Worldly. It comes tomorrow morning, said Fredo, you will be on your way by noon. At the hotel there was a note under my door. Can you meet me at the grape arbor tonight at ten? There was no signature, just a line drawing of a man and woman dancing, a few stars scattered above their heads.

I got there at 9:45 and sat on the bench and let the night breeze drift over me. At ten exactly she appeared in a pale yellow dress, a flower in her long brown

hair, and led me under the arbor. It was the woman from the trattoria, which I'd expected. Who else would it be? What I didn't expect was the lightness of being that came over me when she took my hand. We didn't move at first, just took in the night and the sweet smell of the white gardenias that dotted the arbor overhead. They are our stars, she said. I...but she stopped me, placing her finger to my lips. Then somehow we were dancing, moving effortlessly in and out of the shadows of the arbor. An orchestra was playing a sweet, jazzy tune that I had heard before but couldn't put my finger on, Cole Porter maybe. I didn't care. I was in heaven.

When the song ended, I stood mute, suspended in time. Don't speak, she said, and then she put her lips against mine, softly at first and then with a pressure that liquefied me and shattered my heart into a hundred tiny pieces. I watched as these pieces flew out of my chest up into the night sky where they spread out among the stars. She broke away, smiled and headed into the night.

The next day at noon the front desk called to tell me that a man was in the lobby asking for me. When I went down I saw that it was the pretty blond man who had helped me on the road. I brought your car, he said, it's fixed. You did? Thank you. I told Fredo I would run it up to you, he said. Can you give me a lift back to town? In town I paid Fredo at the garage and then dropped the blond man off at the trattoria. He got out of the car and then leaned back into the passenger window. The tattoo on his arm now included a man in a tuxedo dancing with the woman in the yellow gown.

You shouldn't stay, he said.

I nodded.

If you leave now, you'll be here forever.

I'm leaving, I said. Thank you.

Epilogue/Author's Note

The only image that was in my camera from my stay at the Hotel of Other-Wordly Delights was the one I've used with this story, *Grape Arbor*. There were no negatives of the blond man and the woman in the yellow gown dancing under the

arbor. Maybe they were in shadows when I pressed the shutter release button. Maybe they never existed. Maybe I answered correctly when the blond man asked me what kind of pictures I took and I was swept into their world, their parallel universe. It doesn't matter. I believe that I am now a part of that world and that I will be, as the blond man said, forever.

James LePore practiced law for twenty-plus years, then turned to writing fiction and taking pictures full time in 1999. In 2009 his first novel, *A World I Never Made*, was published by The Story Plant. Four others, in what LePore calls *The Invictus Cycle*, followed. He has written a book of short stories called *Anyone Can Die*, a volume of flash fiction (*Blood, Light and Time*) that evolved from a series of blog posts, and three historical novels, with the screenwriter Carlos Davis, featuring J.R.R. Tolkien and Ian Fleming in WW2 espionage adventures. His latest release is a novella entitled *Breathe in Grace*. His website is [here](#).

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