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People Profile: Sameer Shariff

Editor
**Booklover — Blindness**

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First, "The Joy Report." Joy is my Caribbean bibliophile friend and email correspondent introduced in my last column. Currently the temperature in Eleuthera is in the mid 70s with sky and ocean competing for the finest palettes of blue. At the Glass Window Bridge in North Eleuthera you can assess both the Caribbean and the Atlantic blues simultaneously. The season is in full swing, but Joy still finds the time to send me book recommendations from her notebook. She has a chronological list of every book she has ever read and can find any individual entry with the speed and accuracy of a computerized library catalogue. Her most recent book recommendation is "Infidel" by Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

Soon I’m on Upper King Street in downtown Charleston. I’m on a crusade to scour the Middle East Section of Blue Bicycle Books for any sign of "Infidel." It’s not a case of my being unaware of the convenience and certainty of ordering books on the Internet. Amazon.com and Alibris.com are wonderful Websites and easy to navigate. It just seems a poor substitute for actually feeling the texture of the paper, luxuriating in the cozy environment of a good bookstore and most of all, enjoying the adventure of the hunt. And at Blue Bicycle Books you always have to stop and pet the store cat. True to the historical tradition of crusades, mine is in vain but the hunt is not unrewarded. "Hypocrite in a poufy white dress: Tales of growing up groovy and clueless" by Susan Jane Gilman is my delight, if somewhat unlikely consolation. The title suggests a starkly contradictory theme to "Infidel." However, the humorous approach to humanity and its realities was a refreshing breath of fresh air from the more ponderous world of my most recent "Nobelist" read "Blindness" by Jose Saramago.

A few years ago I embarked on what will probably be a life long project to find and read at least one book by each Nobel laureate in Literature. I’m not even sure if all the authors have books available in translation but with over 100 recipients to choose from, it will be some time before this is a limiting factor.

My frequent treasure hunts at Blue Bicycle Books for the masterpieces from my Nobelist literature list end in enchantment every time I discover a new book for the collection regardless of subject matter. This brings me to "Blindness." Even writing this now, it is difficult to know where to begin or what perspective to use. Should I speak about the delicate and exquisite shades of gray that define us and how these are magnified and reduced so that the reader experiences the horrors of swimming in the belly of the monster called humanity? Crisis divides the river, removes the gray hues and leaves us blind with only black and white. Saramago deliciously intrigues the reader with the white blindness phenomenon that is overtaking the community. Next thing you realize you are confronting the mouth of a monster. Swimming in the belly of the beast is not my idea of a good time. My first three attempts to read this book faltered, as every time I would reach the monster’s belly I would set the book aside to think. Finding almost any contemplation more pleasant than the wretched world of Saramago’s imagination, I would invariably fail to return to the story at all. Finally determined that the book had to be finished, I was relieved to discover that I had already tackled the worst of the story. Once finished I was glad that I had persevered. The story is beautifully written and maybe in the end one can find hope. It was but a few days later I was awaiting the feature film at the local cinema. The previews were rolling and suddenly there on the silver screen was the belly of the beast. I saw the monster — yes a movie based on this book starring Julianne Moore. No, I decided Saramago’s words were going to have to suffice. I was not anxious to revisit that particular vision played out on a giant...