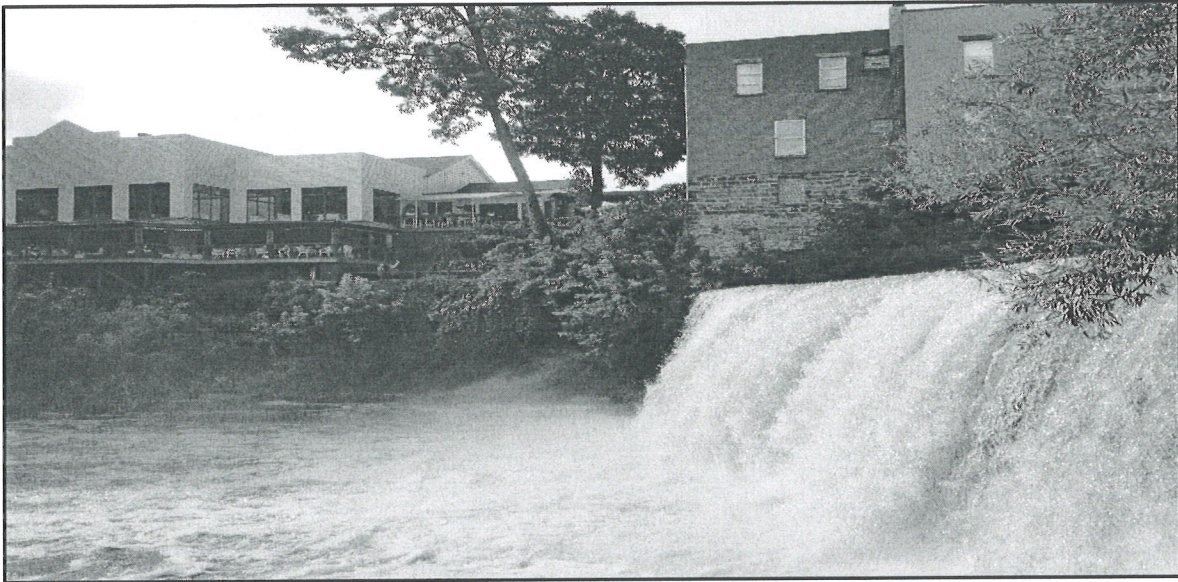


SAMSARA ISSUE #24



SAMSARA MAGAZINE, No. 24, Summer 2023, Editors: R. David Fulcher and L. Flach-Fulcher. Sample copies are available for \$5.50. Make all checks payable to R. David Fulcher. Address all correspondence to **SAMSARA MAGAZINE**, P.O. Box 467, Ashburn, VA 20146-0467. Web site: <http://www.samsaramagazine.net>. Check web site for reading schedule. Authors bios for contributing authors will be available on the Samsara web site at this location shortly after publication: http://samsaramagazine.net/bios_for_24/bios24.htm



Chagrin Falls, Ohio, August 2023

August 2023

Dear Readers,

Welcome to ***Issue 24 of Samsara: The Magazine of Suffering***. For this issue, we are post-pandemic of the public health emergency from COVID-19 and want to acknowledge the health workforce professionals who continue to be our heroes in caring for those still suffering from long COVID-19 symptoms.

This issue reveals thought provoking literary works such as “When God Loses Love” by Arthur C. Ford, and “The Pigeon Man” by Matthew Cartledge. We hope that in the midst of daily routines readers find time to decompress and appreciate the insightful works featured in this issue.

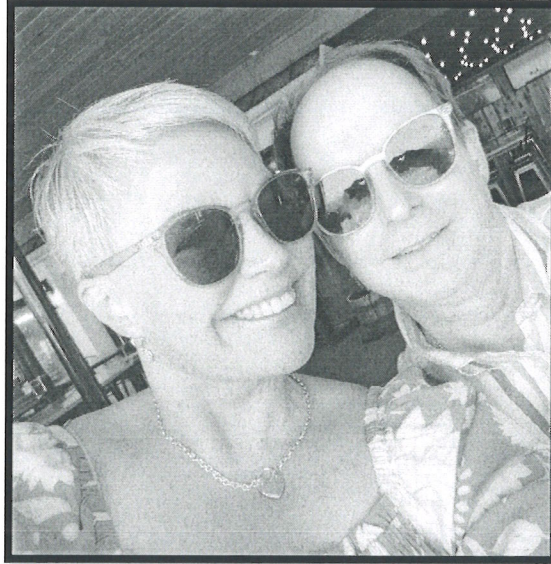
Each published issue showcases written works of authors from around the world and from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. We are pleased that the underlying thesis remains true and constant since Samsara Magazine’s first publication 30 years ago. Our pledge is to carry on in supporting the publishing of literary works through Samsara Magazine.

Thank you again to everyone who continues to support our small independent press.

With gratitude,

David & Lisa

R. David Fulcher and Lisa Flach-Fulcher, Editors
Ashburn, Virginia



Bear Chase Brewing Company, Bluement, Virginia, July 2022

R. David Fulcher, Editor, <https://rdavidfulcher.com/> began publication of Samsara Magazine, <http://samsaramagazine.net/frameset.htm> over three decades ago while in college. His passion for sharing the written word motivated him to become a beacon for others, who have the same enthusiasm, in supporting the publishing of literary works, and thus Samsara Magazine was born 30 years ago. He began writing fiction novels at an early age based on his childhood experiences in College Park, Maryland, and of time spent at his family summer home in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. His college summers were spent honing his craft, writing poetry and short fiction. He earned a minor in English during his undergraduate studies being exposed to great literary teachers, and completed technical writing courses in his graduate studies that helped cement his publishing skills. He authored numerous books and short stories, which culminated in the publication of his novella Trains to Nowhere and Other Stories of World War II (2000), Blood Spiders and Dark Moon (2004), The Cemetery of Hearts (2006), and The Movies That Make You Scream! (2007). His popular book The Lighthouse at Montauk Point (Authorhouse, 2011) won first place in the New York Beach Book Festival in 2012. His story "The Witch Toaster" appeared in the science fiction anthology Dimensions published by Freedom Forge Press (2014). His story "Pumpkin Seed Spit" appeared in the horror anthology Halloween Party 2019, and "Aristotle's Lantern" appeared in the horror anthology Halloween Party 2021, both published by Devil's Party Press. His story "The Bullet Train" appeared in the Hard-Boiled and Loaded with Sin noir anthology from Hawkshaw Press (2023). He continues to write in his spare time inspired by his favorite authors Edgar Allen Poe and Stephen King. His favorite poem by Edgar Allen Poe is "The Raven" for its macabre imagery and syntax. His favorite stories by Stephen King are The Tommyknockers and Dreamcatcher for their sci-fi elements woven into the characters' awakening to unknown dimensions.

Be on the lookout...

Gravelight Press, <https://gravelightpress.com/> will publish his newest collection of horror tales The Pumpkin King and Other Tales of Terror in the fall of 2023, with a sequel targeted for 2024.

Lisa Flach-Fulcher, Managing Editor, interest in art inspired her to become a more proficient writer to express the often beautiful but unattainable words to reflect how one feels when viewing an artistic expression, whether it is a painting, sculpture, or literary work. Her graduate studies helped define her style of writing and improve the operations of their small independent press, Samsara Magazine.

R. David Fulcher completed a Master of Business Administration in marketing from George Mason University, a Certificate of Finance and Accounting and a Bachelor of Science in computer science with a minor in English from University of Maryland. He recently earned a Certificate of Government Financial Management (CGFM) issued by the Association of Government Accountants (AGA). He is a member of the Horror Writers Association (HWA). He spends his free time being a caretaker to his father, Bob, who is a joy and blessing to them.

Lisa Flach-Fulcher completed a Master of Business Administration in public administration with a specialization in accounting and Master of Science in Accounting from University of Phoenix, and a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from University of Maryland. She is a sustainer member, having served seven years of volunteer service (2011-2017) including serving as the Director of Finance 2014-2021, of the Junior League of Northern Virginia. She spends her free time being a caretaker to her father-in-law, Bob, who is a joy and blessing to them.

Spotlight on...

We invite you to read about the authors showcased in Samara Magazine under the *Author Bios* on the Samsara Magazine's web site. After each story or poem, there is a small icon and note that appears if an author submitted a bio for the "Author Bios" section of Samsara Magazine's web site. We encourage you to take time to learn about these amazing authors from diverse backgrounds, who have a passion for the written word, and highlights various aspects of their literary journey. (http://samsaramagazine.net/bios_for_24/bios24.htm).

Samsara Magazine will be celebrating their 25th issue in 2024. Please stay tuned for this celebratory issue with chance to be a showcased author!

Listen to us on **So, What's Your Story? Samsara Press (11/21/2019)** <https://radiopublic.com/so-whats-your-story-WwDVRX/s1!2c7ab> as we discuss the ins and outs of running a small independent press, Samsara Magazine, as the editor, R. David Fulcher, and managing editor, Lisa Flach-Fulcher.

Check out the writer's market guides that includes Samara's Magazine listing for those interested in expanding their publication to other small independent presses. These guides feature hundreds of listings for book publishers, literary agents, fiction and poetry publications, contests, and more. Each listing includes contact information, submission guidelines, and other essential tips.

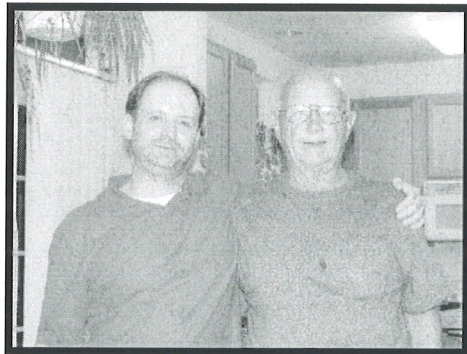
Novel & Short Story Writer's Market by Writer's Digest Books:

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B092RWMJSV?tag=randohouseinc47720-20>

Poet's Market by Writer's Digest Books:

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B092RX3ZSB?tag=randohouseinc47720-20>

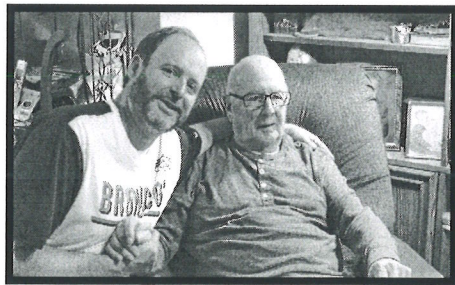
David's Dad, **Bob**, although he does not speak anymore, is full of life. He loves to grab your hand and tries to whistle to let you know, in his own way, he knows you are there. Wonderful healthcare caregivers surround him, we call heroes, who help him with his daily routine at his assistance living housing he calls home. Bob is loved and is a joy and blessing to his family. We continue to pray over him and ask for prayers for continued good health and protection over him. **We love you, Bob!**



David and his Dad, Bob (2013)



Bob's Birthday Celebration (2010)



Thanksgiving Holiday with Bob (2017)



Holiday Naptime (2015)

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“The Pigeon Man”

by Matthew Cartledge

The morning rain showered over the city streets as a tall thin man dressed in grey workout sweats continued to jog through a local park at a quick pace. He had been on the road jogging for close to an hour when his legs began to hurt. Up ahead was a woman walking with a baby in a stroller. The man slowed down before running past the lady on the other side of the path. Out of breath the man slowly came to a stop. He took a seat on a nearby park bench waiting for his heart rate to slow down. After catching his breath, he pushed his arms forward placing them on his knees. With every breath his body hurt. Looking side to side he eventually leaned back letting his arms hang off the back of the bench. The man’s name was Luke Wilkins. He was twenty-eight years old with pale skin and a large red mop of curly hair. He was training for the fight of his life. Luke was a journeyman boxer looking to be a contender. There was no turning back. If he failed to win, he would lose everything he worked so hard for. He would be just another bum. Another nobody.

With his arms draped over the back of the park bench, Luke began to think back to his childhood. There was an old man who had dominated his thoughts on and off for years. He lived just blocks away from his shell of a home in the east end of Vancouver. On the top floor of his home the old man had several dovecotes full of pigeons which he raised with pride. Luke would often visit the old man with his sister Julie on weekends when she was staying at Luke’s home. Sometimes at night when Luke and Julie slept in the same room, they would talk about The Pigeon Man and the various birds he had raised. There were rollers, fantails, homing pigeons and doves with pure white plumage. Luke liked the doves the most but his sister preferred the rollers that flew above the coup rolling downwards in the air before landing inside the coup. Luke thought back to his childhood recollecting his love for birds and the man who took care of them.

Eventually, Luke regained his composure from his long jog. He could feel a little burn in his legs. He got up slowly before making his way outside the park.

After passing through a gate, Luke began to walk down a street aimlessly before a thought struck him. He would go to a nearby cathedral. He wasn’t Catholic but he knew he had to go. After walking in circles, Luke finally found a church that looked appealing. It was a large cathedral style church done in traditional brickwork and mortar. Stained glass surrounded the complex. As Luke entered through a side door for reasons unknown to him, he made a sign of the cross while looking at a large crucifix hanging over the Dias at the front of the church. A few old ladies stood near the hanging cross lighting candles and placing coins in a tin box. As they retreated from the building Luke moved out of their way sliding into a pew before knocking the prayer bench down. The old ladies turned and made a sign of the cross after placing their fingers in a bowl of holy water.

Luke turned from the old ladies while resting his knees on the prayer bench. Alone and looking mystified, he pressed his forehead on the back of the church pew in front of him before closing his eyes. He began to speak softly: “Dear God, I don’t know why you’ve stricken me with such a trial. I don’t think I’m crazy. I just get scared. I box to get rid of the fear. I fight to make a living and tonight I fight for my life. I need to win God; I need to win!” Luke wasn’t surprised by the shortness of his prayer since he

wasn't much of a believer or so he thought. He was troubled by a past he didn't fully understand. He kept getting glimpses here and there on and off for years. He always came back to The Pigeon Man and his lovely assortment of birds. When his parents would fight, Luke would go see The Pigeon Man and learn about his many birds and their various habits. It was his refuge. He felt safe until the bad memories started. Luke leaned back in the pew and looked up at the large crucifix facing both rows of pews in the church. He considered his prayer as he gazed at the God that seemed to choose him even if it were only for a few minutes in time. Luke got up and made a slow exit from the building. He turned and made a sign of the cross to the crucifix before opening the side door. Tired from his long run in the park, he decided he needed to see his trainer and manager at the Fortress Arms Boxing Club before the big fight that night.

Once there he entered an old concrete building. It housed a large ring, speed bags, heavy bags, jump rope and a collection of free-weights next to a mirrored wall. Various men were working out at different stations including two men in the ring. Luke headed for a frosted glass door. Without knocking he entered. Once inside he saw his trainer and manager: Bob Whitman sitting at a desk. The man was old and grey and looked like a well-worn leather glove. He looked up at Luke before putting the phone down. "How's my prized fighter?" Luke sat down across from him. "I went for an early morning jog. I needed to clear my head for tonight's big fight." Bob smiled. "If you win, we go to pay for view. You know what this means right?" Luke nodded his head. "You've been telling me for years... Pay per view is the big time. That's where the money is."

Bob leaned back in his swivel chair rubbing his hands. "I don't want you taking those pills for your head... They take your edge away. You don't need them. Do you hear me?" Luke looked up a little sheepish and embarrassed. "The doctors says I need them. They say I've got a problem. It's just pills." Bob leaned forward in his chair placing his hands on top of the table. "I've invested too much in you to take a chance. I've seen you without your pills. You're an animal. You're unstoppable. That's the fighter I need to fight tonight. No exceptions. Ok?" Luke leaned back in his chair nodding slowly. "You're right, they slow me down. It just that I get strange memories when I go off my pills. I start to change. It's hard to explain."

Bob snapped back. "It's that damn Pigeon Man again, isn't it?" Luke tried to smile. "So, you know?" Bob looked serious as he eased in his chair. "You've mentioned him on and off since your teens. You told me he was like a second father to you when times were tough. Just let it go for now. You hear me?" Luke leaned forward looking grim. "Yes, Sir."

Getting up Bob stepped towards a hat rack grabbing a scarf, coat and fedora before bundling up. "We pick you up tonight at 9pm. Be ready and remember don't take those pills!" Luke got up from his chair and followed his mentor outside the office and into the gym before heading for the streets. The two men looked at each other. Bob smiled. "You're still my prized fighter Luke. I need you at your best." Luke smiled. "I'm with you, a hundred percent." Bob turned his back as Luke headed home.

Luke's one room apartment was small. There was a kitchen and living area. Across from the living room was a small bathroom. On a table near the kitchen was an old land line telephone. Luke picked it up. It said: "Message remaining". He pressed the button to play the message. It was from his sister Julie. The message said: "Hello, Luke, It's Julie. I need to talk to you about your new doctor. Please give me a call." Looking forlorn, Luke reluctantly dialed his sister. The phone rang a few times before it clicked. "Hello?" "Hi Julie, It's me. How are you?" "I'm busy with my social work degree... It's hard work but I am enjoying it." Luke pressed the phone to his ear. "I got your message. You know tonight is my big fight, right? Tonight's fight is the most important event of my life. I need you to know something. I can't keep taking those pills the doctors keep giving me. They get in the way of everything." Julia said nothing for a long time before speaking. "You have to Luke, if not you'll get sick. I don't want you in hospital. You hear me!" Luke paced about with phone in hand. "If I win tonight's fight, I move to pay per view. I could make enough money to take care of us for the rest of our lives." Another long pause separated the two as Julie cleared her throat. "I need you to come tonight. You're my lucky charm. I've got you a ringside seat. You have to be there. Do you remember The Pigeon Man? Do you remember when we were kids? The Pigeon Man kept us safe from mom and dad." Julie paused looking for the right words. "You spent more time with him than I did. I know you two were close." Luke took a seat on a chair across from the kitchen. "When I go off my pills, I get strange feelings and see images of an old man in shadow. I start to feel scared then I black out before waking up again. Do you hear me?" Julie took a deep breath. "You need to talk to a doctor about this shadowy figure that haunts your memories. I've got a new doctor lined up to see you a week from today. You can explain everything then. Just hang on Luke and take your pills. You need to stay well!" Luke got off his chair and paced around his small abode. "I have to do what I have to do... I love you Julie but I have to make my own decisions. Ok?" Julie sighed. "You're coming tonight right?" "Yes, Luke I can be there for you." "That's great Julie you can request your ticket at the door. It's waiting for you. Got it?" "Yes Luke." Luke smiled at the prospect of seeing his sister at ringside. "I've got to get my rest. See you tonight." Luke hung up before taking a seat on the edge of his bed. Then he got up and put the phone on the kitchen table before opening the fridge door. Inside were a half dozen eggs and a jug of milk. Grabbing a glass from the cupboard, Luke cracked the eggs into the glass before adding some milk. In one gulp, he downed the whole thing.

Shaking his head, Luke moved to the bathroom adjacent to the small kitchen area. He opened the medicine chest and pulled out a bottle of medication. He began to read the label. It read: Valproic acid. After pulling the top off. He took a sniff. The pills had a strong smell. He held the bottle up to the light. "I don't need you and I don't want you. After tonight's fight I become a winner! That's me: Luke Wilkins, winner in and out of the ring!"

Luke took the bottle of medication and poured it down the toilet. The pills dissolved in the water as Luke flushed everything down. He waved goodbye as the tank refilled with fresh water. Looking at the empty bottle in his hand he walked to the kitchen and put the bottle on the counter then laid down in bed. Looking at the clock on the kitchen stove, Luke slowly closed his eyes. It was 4pm. He began to dream.

In Luke's dream he saw himself as a boy on the top floor of The Pigeon Man's home where a number of

dovecotes full of pigeons would fly about as others rested inside the various pigeon holes. A large pair of hands comes into view. Within the palm and fingers of the hand sat a white dove and the sound of an old man's voice. "This is how you hold a pigeon son... here take him." As young Luke took hold of the bird he began to smile as he moved the bird in the air while holding it between his fingers. He felt the soft plumage as he continued to hold it. "It's soft, it feels nice!" The old man smiled. "Let him go boy... Birds got to be free to live. Don't ever forget that. Let it go boy!" Luke followed the old man's instructions. Letting go of the beautiful young dove, the bird flew around the coupe before flying through a hole in the chicken wire that led outside. Luke looked up as the bird flew higher and higher into the sky above. "Now boy I need to show you something... but you can't tell anyone..." Luke woke up startled. He looked around the room. The walls were bare except for a small picture of a homing pigeon hanging on the wall. He shook his head. The room was dark as he dragged himself off the bed. He moved to the kitchen and opened the fridge and took a big swig of milk then sat down on his bed. He let his hands run through his big mop of red hair hanging down. Luke had a memory from his youth while training in the ring under his mentor and friend Bob Whitman. It was a piece of advice he thought he had forgotten. Bob once told Luke while sparing: "If you hit a man with eight pounds of force in the throat you can kill him instantly." Luke leaned back with a smile on his face. He wondered why he had the memory. It was an old memory from when he was a teenager several years after the death of The Pigeon Man and the destruction of the dovecotes. When Luke went off his pills the deep and darker his inner visions started to happen. The old anger would come back. The kind of anger that needed to destroy someone in the ring. His trainer was right. Luke just wasn't the same on medication. His senses were blunted and dull. His breathing was lighter. Then the shadowy figures would come. Images from his past he didn't want to see. Luke was slowly coming alive as he recalled dumping his meds in the toilet. He saw himself in the ring making the right combination of moves needed to disarm and destroy his opponent. Luke figured he could take the fight to the finish by the third round.

Luke's phone rang. The ring would stop then start again. The process repeated itself several times before Luke got out of bed grabbing the phone off of the kitchen table. "Hello?" "Hi Luke, It's Bob. You ready?" Luke smiled. "I am starting to feel the fight in me Bob. I'm ready to win!" "That's what I like to hear Luke. Your ride arrives in a half hour. Keep your game face on." Luke smiled before hanging up the phone.

Within a half hour, Luke put on a pair of freshly cleaned grey workout sweats. He stuffed a bag full of items: socks, footwear, underwear, black and white stripped trunks, fight tape, and a set of 8oz black boxing gloves. He had everything needed for the big night. Luke sat on the edge of his bed with his bag of items resting near the front door. His mind raced to the past. He remembered the prayer he had made in the Catholic church earlier that day.

In a day dream state, he remembered The Pigeon Man and the many birds he had under his care. Luke began to see the face of the old man who had been a refuge from Luke's troubled homelife. Luke moved to the kitchen table and picked up the phone. He dialed Julie. It rang several times. "Hello..." "Hi Julie, It's Luke..." "I am on my way to see your fight. You need to know I'm really concerned about you. Are

you taking your pills?" Luke paused not wanting to upset his sister. "I just need to know something." "What's that?" "The Pigeon Man was a good man, right?" There was a long pause that divided the two. "I think he was Luke." Luke pressed the phone to his ear. "I thought we saw him together many times. Am I wrong?" "You're not wrong Luke, I just didn't see him that much... Are you getting bad memories again?" Luke said nothing for a long time. "I got to go Julie. I'll see you at ring side, Ok?" Julie took a deep breath. "You're still my baby brother, got it?" Luke grinned. "I got it!" He hung up. Looking outside a window across from the bed, Luke pushed a curtain aside before pressing his nose into the glass. A black Lincoln town car parked on the street.

As Luke approached the town car, the trunk popped open. He placed his gear inside before opening the rear door passenger seat. He slipped inside then closed the door. Next to him was Bob. "How's my prized fighter doing? Ready to win?" Luke smiled. "The closer I get to the fight the more unstoppable I feel." The car took off as Bob took a swig of booze from a flash. "That's what I like to hear!"

Bob and Luke entered a locker room within the venue. Inside was a black cut man named Roy and two assistants, a bench and a few rows of lockers. Luke stripped down and took his gear from his bag before getting dressed. As his hands were being wrapped by one of Bob's men, one of the assistants gave Luke a big rub down covering his back and shoulders. Luke looked at Bob and began to talk. "You remember what you told me about how you can kill a man with one punch if you hit him in the throat with eight pounds of force?" Bob took a hit of alcohol shaking his head slightly. "I think so, I mean I may have said it. My trainer told it to me when I was young."

With a cigar in his hand, Bob looked at Luke as he continued to be rubbed down all over his backside. "If all goes well you should take this guy in the third round. He's used to fighting at a lower weight class. It's strength over speed... I need you to be strong. Work his midsection before delivering a knockout punch to the head." Luke looked around the room towards Bob. "Did I ever tell you about a man I used to visit when I was a boy? He raised pigeons. I used to call him The Pigeon Man." Bob cut him off. "Yes, you have. Save your childhood stories for after the fight, got it?" Luke said nothing for a while before speaking up. "Sometimes I still see him – The Pigeon Man gave me my love of birds."

Bob got angry the more he paced. "Do you get like this when you go off your pills?" Luke looked up not knowing what to say. Bob had a firm grip on his cigar. "Are you going nuts?"

Luke got up and started throwing punches in the air. "When I go off my pills. I start to feel an anger that's unstoppable. It's what gives me my edge. I'm ready to kill – are you with me?" Bob smiled. "That's the Luke I know and love... now let's go!"

Loud rock music began to play as Luke and his team walked towards the ring. Fans surrounded the venue with smiles, shouts and boos for Luke and his opponent. On the opposite side of the ring was Big Smokey Joe Baldwin, a large heavy-set Irish boxer with years of experience. He was a tall man with a big reach and crooked eyes. In the other corner was Luke with Bob and his team. After a quick rubdown,

Luke headed to the center of the ring. On his way he turned his head and saw a face at ringside. It was Julie. He waved as she called out: "Good luck Luke! I'm rooting for you..." Luke waved at her with an open glove. He smiled at her before heading back into the center of the ring facing Big Smokey Joe. Both men stood eye to eye with a referee standing between them.

The first round went quickly as both boxers faced each other with a variety of punches. Luke got backed into a corner avoiding a flurry of hits before stepping forward with a big body blow to the mid-section. Big Smokey Joe covered up avoiding a knockout punch from Luke as he began to stumble. Both men moved back and forth trading blows in the middle of the ring with the occasional jab or upper cut coming from Joe. Luke stepped back and avoided a cross punch to the face. The bell rang just as Luke was warming up with another body blow directed at his opponent.

Inside his corner, Luke took a seat as a bag of ice was placed on the side of his head. He took a swig of water from a bottle as Ray gave him a rubdown all over his back and shoulders. After taking another sip of water, Luke looked up to Bob hovering above him with cigar in hand. "Keep going for the midsection. It's his weakness. Eventually he will lower his guard. Once that happens finish him with a blow to the head. Got it?" Luke nodded as he got off his stool before heading to the center of the ring.

Joe started strong hitting Luke with jabs to the face. As Luke covered up, he backed into the corner. The two men clenched briefly before the ref broke them apart. Joe stepped back and went for another head shot as Luke bobbed and weaved a number of times before giving his opponent a strong blow to the mid-section. Luke punched so hard that Joe went down on one knee before the Ref intervened. Big Smokey Joe got up quickly and charged ahead throwing a few wild blows as Luke continued to move into the center of the ring setting up a series of body hits that would force the big man back into a corner. Joe covered his face with his gloves as Luke continued to follow Bob's advice hitting him with one body blow after another. Joe began to lower his guard getting Luke ready to take out the Irish fighter with one finishing blow. Just as Luke was ready to finish the match, Joe crouched onto his knees before delivering a surprise blow to Luke's head. Luke stepped back grabbing the ropes just as Joe came in with both hands raised and was just about to deliver a crushing blow when the bell rang ending the round.

Luke took a chair looking up at Bob. "He hit me hard. I mean he really got me... He hit me right in the left temple..." As Luke was given water and a rub down, a block of ice was placed on the side of Luke's temple. Something began to change. For Luke time began to slow down. The second round was harder than the first. But something changed in Luke's mind after the hard blow to his head. Memories began to come. Memories of The Pigeon Man and Luke as a boy started to occupy Luke's mind. Luke felt the meds were out of his system as the bell rang signaling round three.

As Luke rushed towards his opponent, he started seeing a faint image of a dove on the shoulder of Big Smokey Joe. Luke let his guard down briefly looking at the beautiful bird that hovered over the ring. Just as Luke was just about to step forward, he received another headshot from Joe. Luke hit the mat going down on both knees as the Ref began a standing eight count. Something changed inside Luke. A rage

came over him as he saw more pigeons floating around the head of his opponent. Luke started to see The Pigeon Man standing behind Big Smokey Joe as a few more doves continued to appear. Luke started to pant before he started to talk aloud. "I know what you did to me Pigeon Man... I remember now. You hurt me really bad!"

Luke got on his feet and saw the image of The Pigeon Man standing in front of Big Smokey Joe. "I was just a boy Pigeon Man when you hurt me... just a boy!" He stood toe to toe with Big Smokey Joe as the image of The Pigeon Man stood right in front of him. Luke looked over his shoulder and caught a clear glimpse of his sister sitting at ringside. He raised his glove and smiled in her direction. While facing Joe, Luke would have a memory that would change his outlook forever. The Pigeon Man did more than teach Luke everything he knew about the splendor of pigeons. He dehumanized him. Luke was a scared little boy from a broken home with fighting parents. The Pigeon Man was his sole refuge. He had trust in The Pigeon Man... Until the day it happened.

Luke recovered the final memory that would turn him into a killer. The molestation of a ten-year-old boy at the hands of a depraved old man who kept pigeons. The Pigeon Man stood in front of Luke as Luke sat on a wooden workhorse with a dove in hand. He let the bird go as its feathers blew everywhere. The Pigeon Man leaned towards Luke with two open hands. He slid his fingers down the front side of Luke's pants pocket grabbing him with both hands giving a hard squeeze on his tender young private parts. Luke remembered a scream before coming back to his senses. With his eyes opened, Luke would see The Pigeon Man one more time before he would disappear. The Pigeon Man had awakened a memory in Luke's mind buried for years that would unleash a fury of destruction ending in death. For Luke, Big Smokey Joe was The Pigeon Man and his anger was enough to destroy him.

Just as Big Smokey Joe tried to land a knock out blow, Luke bobbed and weaved before yelling at the top of his lungs: "YOU ARE THE PIGEON MAN! AND YOU MUST DIE!"

Everyone at ringside was taken aback by Luke's proclamation. He looked over his shoulder once more catching a quick glimpse of his sister before facing Joe one last time. Luke moved in on the big man with a raised left hand. He remembered what his trainer Bob Whitman had said about killing a man: "If you hit someone in the throat with eight pounds of force you can kill them with one blow."

Luke moved in with a hard left that would land on Big Smokey Joe's Adam's apple with more than eight pounds of force. Enough force to knock out Big Smokey Joe forever. After the knock out blow, Big Smokey Joe lay flat on his face with his legs and arms askew. Blood trickled out of his nose and mouth as the Ref tried in vain to end the fight hoping to revive the dying man.

Without warning the tone of the fight had changed completely. People in the stands began to rush the ring. Big Smokey Joe was slowly dragged off the mat covered in blood as Luke's fight team rushed to the middle of the ring trying to restrain Luke from his carnal rage. Looking at Bob, Luke had a smile. "I told you I'd get him in the third."

Bob looked over at Luke with sheer terror and shock as Ray and his assistants tried to block the onslaught of fans trying to get inside the ring. "He's gone Luke. Big Smokey Joe is no more." Luke looked stunned before he had a smile. "He's The Pigeon Man right Bob? The Pigeon Man hurt me when I was a boy. I hurt him back." Bob looked stunned and horrified as fans started to fight with other fans. Luke turned from Bob and scanned the area for any signs of Julie. Close to a dozen cops had rushed into the arena as things in the stands continued to unwind. As Luke surveyed the area looking for Julie, police officers began to break up the brawling fans.

The cops entered the ring heading for Luke with pepper spray and nightsticks as the whole arena fell into chaos. Luke covered up before knocking out the oncoming cop with one blow. Bob, Ray and his helpers tried to flee the scene as more cops pinned Luke down choking him with a nightstick. Luke began to scream: "I can't breathe! I can't breathe!" Bob tried to reach out towards Luke before being pushed out of the ring by another police officer. As Luke was dragged outside the building, Julie stood at the entrance pushing her way past the police. "I called for an ambulance Luke. It's the best I could do..." Luke looked up at his sister. "I told police to take you to the hospital." Luke looked up with a frown as he tried to talk to his sister. Once the ambulance arrived the backdoor was opened by two paramedics from within. They pulled out a stretcher with the help of the police and placed Luke inside the ambulance as the police subdued him one more time with pepper spray. Luke was handcuffed to the side of the stretcher. One of the cops looked up at the ambulance driver. "This nut just killed someone. He belongs to you now. We will be by later."

Just as the door to the ambulance was about to be closed, Julie approached one of the paramedics. "That man is my brother. He needs serious medical care. I would like to ride with you to the hospital if possible." The driver looked at his partner with a shrug of the shoulders. Both men seemed to think it was ok. "Sure lady, get inside."

As the ambulance arrived at the emergency entrance, Luke began to shake his head as he looked at his wrist handcuffed to the stretcher. He choked a couple of times before looking up at his sister. Julie looked down at her brother with tears in her eyes as the doors to the ambulance opened up. Luke was pulled out by the two paramedics with Julie following at the rear. Luke shook his fists as he looked down at his handcuffed hand. Luke, Julie and the paramedics had made it to the ninth floor before turning into a large empty room with a mat on the floor and a large barred window. One of two doctors approached Luke with a large hypodermic needle injecting it into the left arm of his handcuffed hand. After the injection both doctors stood at the threshold with Julie hovering above her brother. As Luke looked up at his sister, he saw two doves floating in the air. He began to talk as he gasped for air. "The Pigeon Man can't hurt me anymore. I'm safe now... It's ok Julie. I'm free!"



You can learn more about this author on the Samsara Website.

When God loses love

**what comes from above
is the rain that says, “don’t forsake Me.”
Then flowers do bloom
in the bed of your room
now you know, “He’ll never fortake thee!”**

Bills pile high

**wells do run dry
and love’s season do
change, with no reason.**

**But never a day, will
dusk betray
or dawn commit
its first treason.**

When God loses trust

**more love is a must,
put your knees down to earth
then the birth of His mirth
comes within you!**



You can learn more about this author on the Samsara Website

The Architect

by Waverly Long

Once again, my past is surrounding me
Like starving wolves that refuse to eat;
And they salivate and torture me,
Projecting in their red glaring eyes
Shunned scenes from my life of hiding and lies,
Of betrayals and gutless withdrawals,
Of pretending only others had flaws--
Reminding me that the house I built
Stands as a brick and mortar lair of guilt:

A decade pecks and a shingle falls;
Thick vines tighten against the outer walls.
A dark angry persecuting cloud
Hovers low, withholding the loud
Thunderclap that would shatter the dome of fate--
Twisting envy into a gleeful hate--
Smothering promises made too late--
While regrets erode the entire estate.



You can learn more about this author on the Samsara Website.

Hunger

by Phillip Douglas Hudson

There is an icy knot in the pit of my stomach, the kind which causes nausea
A judgment of prior actions which goes against my conscience and moral code
There is the desire to turn back time and the knowledge that this isn't possible
There is a prayer for forgiveness and the hope that he has satiated his hunger

I, that's where it always starts isn't it? Looking in, looking out
Seeing everything around me and not seeing past my own nose
My problem is a little more systemic than the senses

Where does someone start to acquire compassion when all they know is pain?
Why can I not trust when someone simply asks me for something to eat?

How does anybody learn what can't be taught about empathy?



You can learn more about this author on the Samsara Website.

Mr. Wooten, You're Losing Your Moon

by Robert Wooten

The moon draws up her misty veil
to reveal its surface, bright and pale.
The stars all gaze at the large white swan,
knowing soon it shall be gone.



You can learn more about this author on the Samsara Website.

Dear Child

Dedicated to my mother, my superhero . . .

by Anshu Shah

Dear child, respect your mother.
Don't tease her broken English,
not knowing the bitter words she has heard,
and the borders she has crossed for you.
Don't complain about her cooking,
not knowing the hunger she has tolerated,
so you can have a second helping.

Dear child, be kind to your mother.
You don't know how much she has done for you.
Moving to a new country,
a land of strangers,
with nothing of her own.
In a loveless marriage,
she endures her husband and in-laws,
verbally and physically,
so that she can still be with you.

Dear child, forgive your mother.
She is new to parenting.
Her sour words are not meant for you,
but alas, you are her outlet,
as the only one she trusts enough to speak her mind to.
Juggling her whole family,
longing to go to college,
but working to earn,
yet unable to afford those formulas to success.
Learning as she goes,
with a new child to care for,
in a life she did not dream of,
except in her nightmares.

Dear child, support your mother.
She is your biggest fan,
and you're her greatest creation.
She's taking big strides,
clearing the path,
so that you have space to fly.
She's breaking her ties,
estranging herself from her only family here,
just to protect you.

Dear child, help your mother.
She's planning an escape,
which might seem frightening.
To go on the move,
into a new life.
She's doing the unthinkable,
creating a separation,
from danger and you.

Dear child, console your mother.
She cries in the silence,
smiling in your laughter.
She consumes the darkness,
to birth you into light.
Taking the role of 'mother' and 'father,'
caregiver and breadwinner,
tolerating the taunts of her now ex-in-laws,
and scowls of her carping neighbors,
so you can live a new life.

Dear child, tell your mother you love her.
You can't say it enough.
With a debt you cannot repay in a thousand lifetimes,
but forgiven through pure love.
You have no idea how much she yearns to hear it,
and how much she has done,
just for you.



*You can learn more about this author on the
Samsara Website.*

A Grainy Black and White,
My picture window of then
Long past.
A graphic trace,
A remembered place
I'm still holding.
Born in youth
Deep feelings awoken.
Embers of remembered pain,
Remain,
Though forsaken
In an imaginary stream of time.
And now,
Unwanted,
My deep felt cravings
To touch again,
That then,
A place forgotten,
If only
For a healing moment.



You can learn more about this author on the Samsara Website.

IRISH

by Mary Ann Carrico Mitchell

Army of poets
Never less than ten thousand
Sounds AUGHT means OUGHT



You can learn more about this author on the Samsara Website.

Don't Turn Around

by Marlon Jackson

It was a scary position to be in thus everything had seemed almost normal. Even with the lights that were posted below the ceiling against the wall suspended merely a foot apart. Some of them flickered while the others were off, thus the others were somewhat neither bright nor dim, but a half dead glow, as if the lights themselves had wanted to die, be ghost and removed from sockets, thrown away...dead and gone. But the woman who walked on the floor barefoot along the corridor was glad for the remaining bit of light. She felt a big bit of fear that they'd suddenly go out and it'd be absolutely scary not being able to see and not at all knowing where to go. The floor was wet but not enough for her to realize that she must've been in the basement of a hospital or business building. She looked around and she had no idea where she was at this point assuming that she's actually in a basement. She shuddered as she turned her head from left to right looking at the hall which seemed like a long corridor on either side. A probe of fear cruised down like a pass of cool wind had embraced the hairs on the nape of her neck. She shuddered again nearly froze but she still kept her grip by the edge. She nearly panicked but she started hyperventilating to calm her nerves. Moments later she walked taking step by step down the long hall, turned and then came towards where it seemed like an endless walk. The wall paint was peeled off and it was mostly black and there were a few stints of graffiti in the form of circles with more circles and they all appeared like a bulls-eye target except the last middle space was empty. And it left the bulls-eye sequence unfulfilled—yet back to back they were drawn on either side of the wall. The woman looked at them flabbergasted, and she had an awkward facial expressed as she walked to one of the bulls-eye circles. She stopped before it stooped down a bit and she stared at the empty middle. Then she cocked her head a little towards the left and suddenly the middle empty spot of the bulls-eye began to swell like a bubble giving off that inflation sound. Like a balloon being inflated by helium. Then the other one behind her did the same. Then the others all inflated simultaneously and she looked both ways and she saw them swell wide out like an infantry of balloons. Erratically, in a matter of moments they all began to burst loud with a bang simultaneously like a domino effect. *Pop! Pop! Pop! Back to Back!* They all went out! And all the way behind her the mini glows of the pale light from the bulbs flickered and they went out two at a time. *Lord* the bursting sounds of the bulls eye circles—*she shuddered! She froze! She recovered!* Then...she took off!!

She began running like someone was chasing her in the corridor. She was shrieking hysterically and in a panicky voice she screamed, "*Help! Help somebody!*"

Obviously there wasn't a reply or any sound except for those continuous bursting sounds. Trying not to pay too much attention she managed to catch the aftermath of the bulls-eye bursting sounds—there was a black substance that had burst out of the bulls-eye. Mixed with it was thick oozes of blood and she hated the sight of it. Then from behind her came a horrible roar-like sound, so ghostly and high, cold and inhuman followed by a soulless chuckle. Then shrieks came about that sounded like a bunch of wild chimpanzees. Once they weren't chimps...it was something else. And she felt like running with her hand clapped over her ears and her eyes were half opened as she looked forward not knowing how much she ran or how long and scarcely she ended up back where was at square one. Thoughts screamed in her head and she wanted to scream out loud all of her thoughts.

"How'd I get back here?" Fuck that! How do I get outta here!"

One.

Two.

Three.

The popping sounds slowly ended as one last of the wall posted lights blared on from being dim was now bright as ever. She looked everywhere, cold and scared beyond belief. And there was the darkness that surrounded her held bright by that single light. The whole place was silent. She looked before, side to side, then behind her.

And she held on the tip of a nerve. She panicked for a bit and suddenly a high cold voice said aloud, "Don't Turn Around."

"What?!" she cried out.

Then a skeletal hand appeared from behind her and it gripped her shoulder. She shrieked then she quickly made an about face—and that's when it all became bright for a bit and then she saw the horror before her—eyes and there was that scream that shook her to the highest pitch when she wet herself...and she screamed.

"Aaah!" bawled a high voice and the body of that high voice thrust the blankets off of her falling onto the floor. She was in her bedroom alone again after Charles, her boyfriend, left a half hour early to pick up the usual *Daily News* and the *N.Y. Post* and breakfast from Cookies Café. She had the best coffee within the district, and it was an honor to live across the street from her tasty breakfast some folk considered a high comparison to IHOP. But those were only rumors, and quite a few of them were important to Charles or his girlfriend whose name was Tessa. She sat up bolt upright from her bed sweaty all over and she felt a bit sickly. It was the third time this week a nightmare had invaded her sleep. And she'd wake up doused heavily in sweat even while the window in the bedroom was opened a little over half way and a light wind cruised gently in. She never realized how wet her pillowcase was and how nervous she seemed to have been and felt during those moments. She got up shaking her head a little, feeling dizzy and light headed. But when she stood up on her feet slowly it seemed to melt and fade away. When her vision seemed foggy it all came to focus when her boyfriend came inside the house with a few brown paper bags and one plastic one.

"Tessa," he said softly before becoming a bit startled for the third time but not as much as she did the first time around, the hysterical scream and shout which he could've sworn would've awakened the dead. Luckily, none of the neighbors were home at the time next door. If so, they'd perhaps had knocked on the front door and wondered what was going on? But no one did and this happened on the following day and days later it happened again almost at the same occurrence and at the same time. He walked towards the dresser drawer and he placed the items from the café on top of the dresser and he walked to her, and he picked up the thrashed belongings on the floor and he placed them on the bed. Gently, he took hold of her and he said softly, "You had another one didn't you?"

She looked at his eyes with beads of sweat forming on her forehead and two streams of tears forming down her cheeks. She looked grave and she nodded and in a tone just above a whisper, said "Yes." Charles sat beside her on her bed and he said, "You know maybe we should take you to see—"

"A Shrink! I can't see one! I...don't feel like..."

She stopped there. She couldn't think of anymore words to say. She cried.

And he felt sorry. "Oh Tessa," and rubbed her on her head softly.

The sun that was mostly hidden behind the partly cloudy sky, was peering through far longer now that the afternoon finally came. It seemed like a dull summer day in July and not many folk were outside though usually they were. The street corners were usually overwhelmed with folk, but today was different. Today was unusual; today was different. Today circled with smooth touches of misery. Everybody had a little bit of it. It was the month of April and just that month where everybody is in the state of confusion and quick impulse to react with the first instinct of certain things they'd like to take place. And then there was a matter of choices, many different ones scattered like the spread of cockroaches once the light shines upon them. Life was indeed hell and it was dark and hot. As for the temperature, it was a bit muggy outside as faces filled with regular looks happened to be misery on the inside. Maybe it was the weather or perhaps something else? Didn't matter, that's life and as always, everybody had different mood swings even when the cars and city buses rode by or when a triumph of gleeful kids walk by with their school teacher as they all held hands and stuck tight in a pair. This was early spring and the way some minds felt and bent merely like a person dangling upon the last rung of a ladder. But then again life could be better, at least this was on the mind of the old woman who sat on the bench running her fingers on the strings of a banjo. She always played over the last thirty years. Or life can change as she had noticed a great many things; things that maybe out of the ordinary or just by happenstance. In the middle of the street between the parked cars along with some who walked by was a 1967 Lincoln Continental. It cruised by slowly by the curb and halted. Inside of the car were two African men, a wad of smoke emptied from the car windows as soon as the driver rolled them down. The car color was tainted mostly a beige complexion but it appeared to be cared for beyond that. The two of them spoke in Padma, French and English. And it was highly likely that the man in the driver's seat was the one who took orders. He wore a blue hat and around his neck was a string of full colored beads, bones and other items possibly found at a botanical store. The items were quite scary looking from the eyes of any ordinary person who saw them passing by. The man in the back spoke in Padma to the driver, and that was to hand him the medium-sized container filled with some substance that seemed powdery, maybe sand-like. It had an odor that wasn't too foul or good. But it wasn't a smell to brag home about. In fact it wasn't something to brag about at all. The driver was extremely nervous. Even with all the time driving the man he never fully understood or fully trusted and he dreaded far more than anything else. The man in the back seat was known as Basilisk, which in ancient terms means snake, or serpentine, and the dark work he conducted was considerably evil. He was a feared man around his parts and for some reason for this doing for what he's about to do now had some reasoning of only his business. Basilisk uttered a chant that the driver could semi-understand and far mostly he didn't want to at all. He knew it was something bad He felt his heart throb beyond belief. It was in his chest pulsing and beating whatever that powdered substance in that container wasn't good. The driver had almost instantly known this but stayed silent The chant was out of anger and subterfuge. The driver did his best to ignore the words of the change but they were so clear as Basilisk spoke in Padma:

Let death come to those who see and fear reign all over beginning with their feet, the madness, the tears all held what appears, the darkness and the shadows grind these bodies into the ground, as the air sweeps their ashes unto the atmosphere.

The driver felt nervous and a smooth chill ran down slowly from the back of his neck, then sweat trickled down his temples and he did his best not to whimper a sound. His hands were on the wheel shaking quite a bit and he clasped his hands together. And Basilisk, the man in the backseat, rolled down the side window and he whipped out the powerful contents inside of the container and on to the street and it sizzled. The smoke arose from it like an aroma. A small *Pfss!* sound followed by a thunder crack in the sky and dark clouds accumulated like an eclipse. Everything seemed to have turned red and every driving vehicle suddenly stopped; police cars, vans, buses, trucks, everything. People exited their vehicles scared and they looked everywhere in panic. It looked like a huge mist of red smoke. God-fearing it appeared to be.

People looked everywhere, some called out and some were running into each other and falling on to the ground and some people even screamed. Looked frantically everywhere not knowing what to do. Then, there was a semi-searing blue vertical slash along the sky, as if the sky itself was opening. Slowly inside of the Lincoln Continental, the driver contemplated his nervousness to the point he almost wet his crotch. Basilisk didn't appear nervous at all, and he changed again until he finished. Soon after he slowly felt a cold eerie presence swirl among him and drew in a long sharp breath and he gasped hard and jerked forward with his curled fingers as if he were to grab something. And then he slammed back against the seat and he shook as if he were convulsing. His eyes rolled up to the whites and his mouth jittered in a frenzy. The driver felt helpless and he was extremely frightened. In his mind he had the sheer wanting to run out of the car. His hand had reached for the door handle and that's when suddenly a voice shouted in his mind, "*Where do you think you're going?!*" and immediately his hand went back for the wheel and sweat rolled down his forehead. The voice was so dark, ingenuous, deep and inhumane. The smell of shit satheled in the driver's drawers He knew he shit on himself and he couldn't move for the life of him. Sweat trickled down his eyes nervous as fuck looked from side to side and he closed them tightly for a moment. Hopeful thoughts filled his conscious, but it all went away when Basilisk seemed to return back to normal. The Basilisk uttered, "*Drive.*" Right away the driver's eyes opened and he glanced in the rearview and saw how red the Basilisk eyes were and then returned back to normal. Basilisk didn't mind or seem to be bothered by the odorous smell. It almost pleased him as he chuckled deeply. He appeared to be pleased as if nothing bothered him. Nonetheless the driver drove off and into the mass of cars leading into traffic.

The sky seemed to have come to brief stand still; the air became vaguely stale and everyone realized a dank smell fumed suddenly from everywhere. It smelled horribly like fertilizer mixed with sewage and the funky smell of someone passing gas. The stench made people gag and their eyes water. Some people coughed rapidly and squinted their eyes as if they were being blinded by misty stinging smoke. People looked out their home windows and witnessed this...suddenly a black circle like the one in *The Mummy* movie with Brandan Frasier; slowly moved and it engulfed the sun turning the whole sky inky black. Then the smell slowly faded away and the vague shiny sun rays remained visible. Yet people had

barely seen one another when the screams suddenly began. The people were running, fell to the ground when a dark force appeared equivalent to the evil that existed in *The House on Haunted Hill*. But people were dying soon after being chased by a source that screamed a chilled laughter, filled with sinister inhuman, thrill joy...

The moon suddenly bloomed up to the sky like a lit torch...and in an instant the day was gone and the illuminating moon rays shot down below like spears.

The 1967 Continental was parked along a dark alley. The ignition was turned off and the two man-like forms were in the car sitting almost emotionless hearing the screams and the man behind the wheel did his best to hold his nerves together. His hands trembled each time he had heard a scream, as if he felt the victims pain somehow. They were ecstatic and constant and no telling when it'll end...if it does end. Later, the smell had ended and all appeared to be almost back to normal. Charles beforehand decided to step out for a long walk outside. Most folk assumed it was bad exhaust from the chemical grounds in the outskirts of the city.

Tessa was at home glaring at the TV trying not to think of her past nightmares. She flicked through the channels avoiding any horror movies or sitcoms. She caught a few cartoons that she'd watched as a child: Winnie the Pooh, Ghost Busters, Beetle Juice, etc. She smiled a bit at the cartoons and enjoyed them. She couldn't laugh though. Just didn't have the strength for it. The creepy feeling of things that she had in her mind from her post vivid nightmares was at the back of her mind now. She for the first time in a while felt safe and secure. She got up and went to the kitchen and turned on the sink faucet, wetting her hands. She wet her face too and decided to make a sandwich. She finished her sandwich in four bites. She appeared at ease now, she went to wash her plate and hands again. After finishing, she settled the dish into the disk rack. Before she even returned to the couch, the front door barged in. Tessa, instantly startled, jerked back and jumped. It was Charles, on his face was a smear of blood across the left side like war paint. The expression on his face appeared as if he'd seen horror before his eyes, like an accident occurred just outside.

"*What happened?*" Tessa cried out intensely. She stared bug-eyed at Charles.

An explosion reverberated from outside somewhere, perhaps on the street. Wherever it came from shook Tessa and Charles down to their feet. It didn't take long until the sounds of police sirens blared. She approached Charles with caution and moderate tension. The sound of the explosion was indeed scary. Was it a bomb? Did a car collide with another car? Maybe it was perhaps a truck or van? It didn't matter. Tessa crossed back over to the living room towards the window, spread open the curtain with both of her hands and she saw the havoc on the streets. People were running and screaming at the top of their lungs for help. They trampled over each other, cars banged into one another, ran into streetlights, light poles etc. People were struck by vehicles, some were ran over on the street. Up above in the sky it was pitch black and the moon extremely bright and the moon rays along with the city lights illuminated the ground. Then a thunder squall struck in the sky, in slow to quick motion was sudden rainfall, even amongst the screams of terror. What was the cause of it? Why were people running and screaming? Tessa didn't know. Even when she saw Charles bolt inside of the house. She backed away from the window and she released the curtain. It all seemed like a nightmare. But Tessa knew it wasn't.

No matter what was running through her mind. No matter how much she wanted to wake up from what appeared to be a nightmare. This was real and she knew it and she didn't know what to do. But she didn't panic. She struggled not to panic because she didn't want to pass out or shriek from fear. She had taken meds for moments like this before but the feeling was somehow...different.

"Charles!" Tessa snapped. He looked at her, a bit calmer now, his eyes bulged a bit. He looked a little disoriented and as he tried talking, suddenly the phone rang. Tessa looked at the phone, then at Charles waiting to consult, unsure of what to do. Again the phone rang and answering was more a prominent decision for her. And when she answered it, it was a bawling voice on the other end screaming hysterically, "Hello! Tessa! TESSA! Whatever you do! Don't look at it! DON'T TURN AROUND!" then the voice trailed away and staticky sounds followed by a squadron of screams that sounded awfully like the ones that hailed from outside. Then the phone was disconnected. Tessa removed the phone from her ear and she immediately dropped it onto the kitchen floor. She turned and ran to Charles approaching him with caution. In an attempt to softly press her hands against his shoulders, she then decided not to. "Charles!" she sprung his name again. That sounded like a whisper. He turned to her fully, his eyes struggled to avert locking with hers.

"You're supposed to be the strong one! You're my boyfriend and you assisted me with my nightmares! Now tell me Charles what the hell is going on?! On the phone it sounded like—" she stopped. She was gonna say Cookie from the diner, it sounded like her but she was unsure. It also sounded like the waitress Evelyn. She's been to her place before and they played board and card games together. Yet within those few seconds before Tessa could decide came another explosion in the distance. It sounded a bit like a grenade went off. But there weren't any known crazies in town. Not a single nut who'd toss a grenade for any reason and let it go off. However, as the saying goes, shit happens. And the havoc that's going on now is what's happening.

"SOMETHING UNIMAGINABLE! I SAW IT LITERALLY KILL KATHY FROM DR. JAYS CLOTHING STORE!" Charles shouted. His voice was broken but understandable. "She just turned around and looked at it," he continued. "I've seen from a distance or two and a half blocks her body melt and turn black as midnight and evaporate into dust. Like a pillar of dust, when Lot turned back at the fire that rained down from heaven. Her scream only lasted for a few seconds. Even people in their cars, who looked in their rear view mirror saw it. It travels slowly then speeds up like clouds and fog. Only it's black and I've heard from a distance I stood at, shrieking sounds of agony and God knows what else I just...took off Tessa. Oh my God! What is happening Tessa?" His voice trembled as he spoke of all this. Tessa understood most of it. Tessa understood most of it almost easily. But what was it that Charles had seen that frightened him? A black cloud? A force of darkness or a mist? It could've been anything that Charles couldn't specify that he couldn't even be sure of what he'd seen. Charles pressed a hand against his forehead and he leaned against the front door and slowly slid down to a squatting position. His breathing was harsh and steady. "I think it's better that we stay indoors until we can figure this out. If there's anything to figure out." Tessa, bewildered, asked, "What about everyone outside? We can't just stay here when everyone else could be dying? Don't you hear the screams?! The explosions!? These people need our help," Tessa said rambunctiously. Charles looked at her eyes directly and wanting to yell at her, but he kept himself calm.

With gritted teeth he said rapidly, "After what I've just told you, do you believe that we can just jeopardize ourselves? It looks similar to what you've told me all about! Your cold sweats, blankets thrashed on the floor. Any of this ring a bell?"

Tessa nodded slightly and chuckled. But it quickly faded away. Thus she remained silent as she still felt the need of helping others a necessity.

"What're we gonna do now Charles?" Tessa asked frightened.

Suddenly multiple hard knocks came from the front door. Immediately Charles was startled and he fell forward and landed on his palms, almost as if he were in a push-up position.

Tessa quickly made her way to the door and as she touched the door handle—

"Tessa, what the fuck're you doing?!!" Charles snapped.

She turned the doorknob and she opened it. Tessa barely recognized the familiar face that wore an aghast expression.

"Cookie," said Tessa, surprised. Without hesitation Cookie ran inside and she shut the door, turning the lock. Cookie looked at Tessa in an attempt to say something, but she was out of breath. She glanced down and saw Charles looking up at her with a semi-puzzled expression on his face. Tessa went to help him stand, he stumbled a bit but was on his feet. Then Charles looked at Cookie's panicky face.

"I don't mean to sound so abrupt, but Cookie you've just banged on our door, come inside without giving any reasonable explanation—"

"I just called here! There's havoc outside, can't you hear it? Explosions! But mostly—", she stopped her breath momentarily, then continued. "I saw something...horrible from a far distance. It was dark, horrendous. Shrieking sounds came from it. People were screaming and the force, whatever it was moved in a cloud or a huge dense fog and there were hands that protruded from it. I think they were hands. But when people turned around, they screamed and then they were all gone. Their skin sort of melted and poof, they were dust in huge piles then somehow they were all consumed." She stopped there. Charles nodded, "That's exactly what I saw and it was," he paused for a moment, "fucking...horrible! Oh Lord..."

They looked at each other, speechless. Scared thoughts echoed in their minds like pinballs slamming simultaneously within the interior of their skulls. They didn't think of what was it they could possibly do. Is waiting one of them? Waiting to die, if that's what's gonna happen.

"What are we going to do?" Tessa asked abundantly.

They looked at her silently.

"Well we just can't wait here! There's gotta be something!" Tessa continued.

"Tessa," Charles said, "And what is it that we're supposed to do? There's truly nothing to do with all that havoc you hear outside." He paused, looked at Cookie, then asked, "Why'd you come here by yourself?" Charles asked suspiciously.

Cookie looked at Charles, flabbergasted. She opened her mouth but no words came out. The house lights began to flicker, first on one side, then the other. A roaring-like sound came from outside, from something inhuman. The flickering stopped. The trio looked at each other, frightened, and the flickering began again. The sounds of people running continued and their screams could be heard, and

unexpectedly, the flickering stopped. And then all of the house windows simultaneously blew inward. Shards of glass sprayed forth all over the place, on the floor and on them. Then suddenly the room began to slowly fog.

"Oh my God," Tessa said.

This reminds me of my nightmares, she thought.

Keen and ecstatic high-pitched screams rose and then the next sounds were protruding footsteps that reached behind Tessa's front door. Fists were banging on the outside of it, pounding to an extreme.

"Help! Please help! If anyone's inside please help us!" The voices bawled.

Then the sound of wind rushed by and everything stopped.

"I think we should go out your back door," said Cookie.

Charles was scared and shocked by how hard the fists pounded against the door. It sounded like a row of drums being tapped at a show. He remembered he'd done so at Junior High School. Then the lights flickered once again.

"Oh my GOD!" Someone said from outside of the door. It sounded like a woman. Then there was a swishing sound—"DON'T TURN AROUND!" a man bellowed. Feet thumped and simultaneous screams hailed from excruciating pain, death rattles...

"I think we should back away from the door," Charles said absentmindedly.

Slowly they took backward steps. The flickering lights exploded! And in a jiffy they all turned and ran. Constantly the front door was pounded from the outside. The fog continued sailing through the windows. The trio dashed across the living room bypassing the kitchen table and they were at the back door. Charles fumbled with all of the locks trying to get the door opened. "Oh, this fucking door!" spat Charles. He continued fumbling with the multiple locks and the interior of the house was turning black from a foggy misty essence. A shady color.

"Oh my God, I'm so scared," Cookie whispered. Tessa was shaking a little bit, yet she tried her best to maintain her stance.

"Oh my God this is it. Please don't turn around," Cookie croaked.

Tessa couldn't help it, at least for the moment. She slightly turned and caught the sight of the image of a figure. An apparition, his eyes were both red and black, his face dead calm and his feet never touched the floor. It was Basilisk, the man who expelled the chant from the cab. Then they heard a hiss sound and at the same time Charles opened the last lock.

"I've got it! Let's go gals!" he shouted. Then he ripped open the door and they ran for their lives screaming in fear and terror. Up above in the sky the clouds wavered closer as if they were going to touch the earth. Thunder rumbled, clouds turned and twisted, imploded within one another and the three of them were terrified at the sight of it. Ravenous thoughts and questions raged in their minds, "Was this the end of the world? What on earth is going on? Why is this happening?"

There were other people running as if something were after them.

"Where's your car?" Tessa asked Charles.

Charles frantically looked everywhere. Blindly he walked up a few paces and he spotted his Honda along a curb. By the sidewalk lay a young woman dead, looking up. Her eyes glazed at the sky. She appeared to

be trampled to death. They all looked at her. "There's nothing we can do," said Charles exasperated. "Get in," he said coolly. He left the doors unlocked and as soon as he was behind the wheel he dug into his pockets and his hand shook as he pulled out his keys and inserted them into the ignition and they took off. People screamed frantically everywhere as he drove along the street. Only two blocks down came a sudden rush of wind from behind them and slowly things became foggy and the Honda stopped at an intersection. Now they were in plain sight.

"Oh my God, what're we gonna do?" asked Cookie from the backseat. Charles sat still behind the wheel and he stared at the rearview mirror. Tessa said while looking at the side view mirror there was a black cloud of fog behind them. Moments later a triage of people came running through it as if they were being chased Screaming, crying out to high noon and a dark shadow within the whiteness of the fog. A bunch of them ran towards the Honda and they were brawling on the car, tapping the windows feverishly bawling out, "Let me in! Let me in! Please let me in! There's something in the fog! I need your help! Help us! We need your help!"

There was a high maniacal chuckle, soulless and the people who were running within the fog never made it out. Instead, their screams could be heard. The people who surrounded the Honda were startled as they looked at the fog with shock and amazement. But they were also terrified. The sound of that laughter was too inhuman. Charles, Tessa, and Cookie all turned and saw a huge shadow move within the fog. It was turning all black. "Fuck this," said Charles abrasively. Then he pressed down hard on the pedal. People wailed and shouted while the Honda sped away.

"Slow down Charles! You might get us killed!" Tessa said to him nervously. Cookie whimpered. She looked at the window up above in the sky, the moon was full but it looked like a gigantic mystic fog swirled within it.

"Charles, slow the fuck down!" spat Tessa.

She looked at him deviously then up ahead from a distance she saw him...up ahead from a distance she saw him...the figure from earlier. The Basilisk, and it was only an apparition of him. As they drove closer he could be seen completely. Cookie stared and she asked in a shaky voice, "Who's that?!"

Charles slowed down a bit and replied, "I don't know! Dude is crazy!"

Tessa looked hard but tried not to and as they drew closer, the eyes of the apparition terrified her. Then Charles pressed down hard against the accelerator.

"Make a quick left beneath the Verrazano Bridge!" yelled Tessa.

Just as Charles turned, everything turned misty and foggy. Then a tire blew out, Charles swerved the wheel and the car spun nearly half way around before it rammed into a light pole. The pole clamored and thrummed like a tuning fork. Then it strenuously bent forward and clamored down over the Honda. The light flickered and then it shattered. Electricity and smoke filtered around them like a shattered light bulb. All three in the Honda coughed and shook their heads slowly. Charles, out of break asked, "Are you two alright?"

Tessa chuckled, "Thank God I put on my seatbelt."

"I did too," said Charles.

Cookie lay with her head cocked back against the seat of the car. Her breathing was erratic but she was

still and she blinked steadily. Then thunder in the sky rumbled again and lightning struck across the sky. Light rain began to fall and the electricity from the light pole sizzled.

"We gotta get outta here," Tessa said exasperated. Tessa unbuckled her seatbelt and she turned to Cookie with her head still laid back. Slowly Cookie lifted her head forward and she looked a little dazed and confused.

"We've gotta get outta here," Tessa said again. Then she exited the car. The light pole toppled on the hood of the car. Tessa took a few seconds to catch her breath. Sweat ran down her face and she wiped it down with both of her hands. Her leg cramped and she limped a bit as she went towards the back door of the car to help out Cookie. She opened the door and helped Cookie exit the car. She was a little dazed and she was silent. As Charles exited the car he staggered a bit then he straightened up and placed his hands over the pole. Though he felt a bit weak and fatigued, he found the strength to push over the light pole. One leg over then the other, and he went around the hood of the car. "What're we gonna do now gals?" He stopped and noticed the blackness of the mist growing darker and wider as it expanded.

Tessa saw it and then Cookie.

"We've gotta run," Tessa said but only in her mind. She froze and suddenly felt a huge shudder when a hand grasped her shoulder. It was Charles and in a semi-raspy voice he said, "Let's get the fuck outta here!" And right away they started running. Cookie was trailing them. "Don't turn around!" she shouted. "Whatever you do, don't turn around!" Cookie stopped and she lost her breath. Her breathing was harsh, she almost gasped for breath. The dark foggy mist trailed behind her. She felt it and she turned around slowly. Then she screamed. Her scream was ecstatic and there were ripping sounds then they heard no more. Charles and Tessa continued running. They both heard it, wanting to turn around but couldn't. Tears ran down Tessa's eyes. But she couldn't slow down. She didn't allow herself to stop running. They made a left and they cornered an empty alley. They walked down and there was a precinct in the lot. All of the parked patrol units and U.V.'s were destroyed, shattered glass was sprayed all over the ground, and there was blood all over. There were no bodies anywhere.

"Let's step inside here," said Charles out of breath. Inside the lights flickered, some were as bright as day. It was a mess everywhere and there was more blood inside. There wasn't a single police officer inside. The windows were shattered.

"Hello!" shouted Tessa.

Charles said loudly, "Is anybody here?"

Nothing but the sound of the air rushing by, papers wavering across the floor.

And slowly the precinct was getting a little foggy. The lights that flickered went dead and the brighter lights grew mildly dim and most of them began flickering.

"Oh my God," said Tessa.

"We can't go out there. It's out there, the fog or mist or whatever it is..." her voice trailed away.

Rumbling came from within. The LED lights in the ceiling shook, then the whole precinct. Both Tessa's and Charles' voices were drowned by the thunderous sounds that ruptured again. This time, it was more vicious and consistent. There was a heavier rainfall that came down again and some of the flickering

lights blew out. Some of them shattered. The whole precinct shook violently and one of the LED lights fell off its hinges and landed on top of Charles. He fell face forward on the precinct floor.

"Charles!" Tessa exclaimed. She knelt to him and shook him as if to wake him up. Blood ran down the corner of his forehead and face. His skull was fractured, he appeared unconscious, but when Tessa checked for a pulse there wasn't any sign of life.

"Charles," she continued. *"Please don't die on me!"* she whimpered. Then all of the lights exploded at once. Then the emergency lights flickered on. Then the misty foggy essence filled the precinct. The place was turning dark now, even with the emergency lights still on. Within the foggy essence she caught sight of the apparition, then she turned and immediately ran. More LED lights fell on to the floor. Unable to see Tessa shot her arms out and pressed her hands against a door and ran inside. It was the women's bathroom. She closed the door and shut the slide lock. She cried, hard. *"Charles,"* she mouthed. Then a banging sound reported from outside the bathroom door. Hard as if someone was trying to get in. Then the bathroom light flickered and from beneath the door there was that misty foggy essence that seeped beneath the door. Like tiny fingers with sharp nails. The light flickered and a high cold voice said sinisterly, *"Don't Turn Around,"* right from behind Tessa. Then a cold hand thumped on her shoulder. Almost immediately she turned around and screamed! An instant later the bathroom light blew out.



You can learn more about this author on the Samsara Website.

Inpatient Awaiting

by Rick Anthony Furtak

Bleached linen? Or, whatever it was, the smell
of *this* hospital bed was just like *that* –
at the other place. And, after all
the waste so far this year (of water, light,

labor, electricity, etc.) –
still you who wished to live without machines
are caught up in the labyrinth of medicine.
Its rituals, red tape, and expertise:

*Bewildered affect, keeps repeating things;
the patient reports confusion, seems confused.
Involuntary twitching. History
of histrionics, evidenced by tattoos.*

*Does not know where he is – so they profess.
You burn, as paper cringes to a fist
of ash. Oblivious to any message,
the quiet, sunburnt, eyeless palm trees wither.*



You can learn more about this author on the Samsara Website.

Shake against the Cold

by Rick Anthony Furtak

Subtly the anesthesia pushes
Through you – like an icicle –
Leaving limbs asleep, not yours.

A nurse's exhortation tenderly
orients you when the hypnosis clears,
tells you that all is well.

And if it isn't,
estranged arms like dead weight, eyes unopened,
would you even know what had occurred?

And which is worse: being a creature who
watches its own blood darkening the snow,
or entering nowhere, never finding out?



You can learn more about this author on the Samsara Website.

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by Robert Wooten

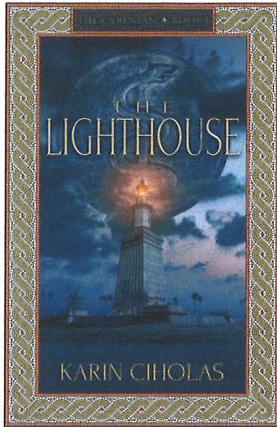
Inside I stand
a broken man,
a pillar broken down
in a foreign conquered land.



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ADVERTISEMENT – “THE LIGHTHOUSE”

Contributor Karin Ciholas had a story "The Secret of Umbria" featured in Samsara Magazine in 2000. Here is information on her new novel:



Full Title: The Lighthouse (The Cyrenian, Book 1)

Author's name: Karin Ciholas

Publication date: November 15, 2022

Publisher: Atmosphere Press

ISBN-13: 978-1639885930 / 978-1-63988-732-3 (Ingram)

Retail Price: \$19.99 Trade Paperback

Genre: Historical Fiction

Page Count: 410

Audience: Adult

Synopsis: Simon is a gifted physician who faces constant danger as a Jew in first-century Egypt under Roman rule.

When Meidias, an escaped convict, declares a “holy” war against Jews and abducts Simon’s sister, Simon’s search for her leads him on a treacherous journey to slave markets in Alexandria and to Jerusalem where a Roman soldier forces Simon to carry a crossbeam for a stranger. Simon is troubled by the stranger’s death but does not know that this moment will change the world forever.

Simon's passion is Aurelia, inaccessible daughter of a Roman senator. His mission is revenge against the outlaw Meidias. His ambition is justice for his family and his people. His torment is the conflict between his Hippocratic oath and his vow to kill Meidias.

As his medical reputation grows, he comes face to face with prefects and emperors and the poor suffering masses of Alexandria and Rome. Overwhelmed by the plight of his people, he tries to stop what becomes the first pogrom in Alexandria.

THE LIGHTHOUSE moves between Egypt and Italy and back to Alexandria. It is a story about family love and loyalty, medical breakthroughs and heartbreaks, and one man's quest for justice for his people.

About the Author: Karin Ciholas was born in Virginia and grew up in Switzerland where she studied classical languages. The study of Latin and Greek led to her fascination with the ancient world and its history. She earned advanced degrees in languages and comparative literature at UNC Chapel Hill and enjoyed teaching modern languages and courses on the ancient world. She has won twelve awards for her short stories and plays. She lives in Sarasota with her husband, author and theologian Paul Ciholas.

Please consider checking out Karin's new book!