

THE WOMAN IN WHITE

by Amir Shehata

I sit on my desk and draw a picture of a woman in white, standing on a bridge looking out at the horizon. Gray water runs under the bridge towards blackness looming large. I hang the picture beside similar ones on the wall of my room. But there is progression to the drawings. They all have the woman in white, but the blackness grew over time. At first it was just a thin black line on the horizon, but now it takes a large portion of the paper.

Pause.

This is not some abstract artistic representation of my psyche. This is my world. You'll soon see.

I go about my daily routine.

Brush my teeth.

Take a shower

Pickup my briefcase.

Start my walk to work.

My world is very mundane. Nothing exciting ever happens. Except that woman.

I cross the same bridge I drew in my pictures and the woman is there, dressed in white, staring intently at The Great Divide. Should I stop and talk to her? I divert from my course only slightly, but like a robot I get back on my well trodden path and walk past her.

Oh wait, rewind.

The Great Divide.

You're probably asking what that is. I wish I knew. I don't think anyone knows, really. It's just always been there. I tell you one thing though, everyone knows to stay away from it. Wanna know a secret? It's getting closer.

Consuming my world slowly. But no one else seems to be worried. So why should I?

My eight hours at work passes very slowly. Honestly, I look at myself and the others and I think we're zombies. Look at this. You almost can't tell us apart. We do the same things over and over again.

Work.

Coffee.

More work

Go home.

Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

As I walk past the office window, I stop and look at the Great Divide. A few of my coworkers stand beside me staring out as well. We all have our cups of coffee in our hands. Suddenly, the blackness of the divide advances. And some

buildings I saw before, I can see no longer. My hands shake and a little bit of coffee spills. But when I look at my co-workers standing beside me, they watch it casually as if it's something that happens every day. Some of them take a sip from their coffee and go back to their routine. I hesitate for a moment, but then follow suite.

The next morning, I finish one of my art pieces. The woman in white standing on the bridge watching The Great Divide. It's bigger now. I hang it up on my wall beside the other paintings and stand there staring at them.

A thought brushes by my gray matter. "Is there more to life?"

But what would I want more than what I already have? I shake off the thought and leave for work.

I cross the bridge and there standing towards the end of it is the woman in white. The Great Divide is now closer than ever. We could just walk to it. I don't know how long I'm gonna be able to take this bridge. The Divide might over take it soon and then I'll need to find a different route to work.

I look at the Great Divide. It extends from the earth to the sky. Can't see past it. What if tomorrow the bridge is gone and I never see the woman in white again? I'll lose my chance to talk to her forever. This thought pushes me to walk over and stand beside her. A long moment passes. Both of us stare at the Great Divide.

A few others walking by notice us, well they notice her mainly, and they congregate around her. We're all like zombies. She's the only one

who's different.

I finally gather enough courage and ask.

"What are you looking at?"

"Don't you see it?" She asks.

I look intently at where she's pointing, but all I see is the Great Divide. A wall of blackness so close I can reach over and touch it.

"The Great Divide?"

"No. The door."

I look again, but I can't see anything.

The others who stand with me go back to their routine. With a huff and with a puff, they walk away.

"Have you ever thought if there is more than just this?" She looks me straight in the eyes and asks. The question shakes me to the core.

Is there anything else or is it just this world?

I shrug.

She looks back at the great Divide.

I fully expect her to forget about this foolish endeavor and head to work. I know I will.

"Well, good day," I say.

But she does something I wasn't expecting. She jumps over the low end of the bridge and runs towards the Great Divide.

"Hey, what are you doing?" I call after her, but she doesn't stop.

I know if I follow her, I'll be making the biggest mistake of my life, but I do it anyway. I run after her.

It takes us only moments to reach the edge

of the Divide's blackness. The earth is black. The sky is black. And it's spreading; slowly but surely.

I pick up a rock and for the sake of an experiment, I throw it at the Great Divide. It disintegrates into a puff of dust. Poof.

"We better get out of here," I'm afraid.

She looks back at me and points at something farther off. "The door," she says and starts running parallel to the Great Divide.

"Wait," I call and run after her, but then she swerves sharply and runs right into the Divide. I reach over and grab her arm in panic, stopping her.

"Don't," I say.

"Let me go. Please," she pleads with me.

"You'll die," I remember the rock. It

disintegrated I tell ya, just like that.

She pulls her arm out of mine. I stare in horror as she enters the Great Divide. But she doesn't vanish as I thought she would. To my astonishment, she stands right in the middle of the Darkness unharmed; a single spot of light in the midst of a sea of gloominess. She looks back at me and smiles. Our eyes lock and a fear grips my heart.

If she goes through I'll lose her forever.

Is this the door she was talking about? Or is it just the light reflecting off her white dress? No, it's the door. It's hidden quiet well in the blackness of the Great Divide, but it is there.

"Come with me," She gestures at me and then steps through the door and disappears.

I stand there hesitant.

I look back at my world.

Everything continues running as clockwork. I can see my work building from here. I see the cars driving back and forth. All the same make. All the same color. I see the people walking to work, but now some of them stop and watch me in astonishment. Will I go through the door in the Divide?

My world is predictable. My world is mundane. My world is safe.

I look back at where the woman was. The Great Divide spreads towards me. Some rocks on the ground very close by me decay into a puff of dust as soon as the blackness touches them. The dust floats up and the wind blows it away. I don't move from my place. I'm not afraid

anymore.

I can see the door clearly now, closer than ever, open. A tunnel of light through the darkness. With a final glance back at my mundane world, I make my decision and walk through the door.

There is a moment of complete whiteness. Am I dead? Then my eyes adjust to my surroundings.

I sit at a desk. There is paper scattered on the desk. One of the pieces of paper has the words "The Great Divide" written on it. The material the desk is made out of is so much different from anything I've ever seen in my world. I run my hands over it, and I notice that my hands are different as well. I look at them in astonishment, then I look around me. I'm in some sort of a study. I walk around looking and

touching details I couldn't imagine before.

Where am I? Everything is so much more real than what I'm used to.

I end up in front of a door. The exit to the study. I hesitate for moment, then I open it and go through.

Sensory overload.

The bright light of the sun overwhelms me.

The beauty of the green pasture overjoys me.

The sight of the mountains covered with snow on the horizon moves me.

And not too far away, a woman stands on a small bridge, overlooking a narrow pure creek.

She looks at me, smiles and extends her hand to me. I walk over and take her hand.

"Good to have you back," she says.

I look down at the creek and see my

reflection in the water. It's not the face I remember, but it is the face I always knew I had.