

Border Line

a story by

Pier Celeste Marchetti

(English translation by Wendy Piemonte)

The world was now divided into just two parts. Unlike what could have been reasonably and traditionally expected, the separation was not a natural obstacle. It was a line running from one bank of the river to the other, instead of dividing the course of water into two along the middle which would have been the sensible thing to do. It was not known when, by whom and why it had been traced in the past, because it had been decided that the present was what counted, so all history books had been burnt in a fire. So memories had flown away with the smoke as it rose densely towards the sky.

The armies were lined up on one side and on the other, fully armed to defend their native soil, ready to unleash all hell should even one little ant dare cross the line. The simple soldiers didn't know why they had to prevent the other side from passing, and even less so did their generals. All memories had gone lost in the smoky clouds at the time of the big fire. Likewise, nobody could remember why those in the north (or the east, west or south) wore black and white stripes, while those in the south (or the east, west or north) wore white and black stripes. In some ways it was just like a song about a white bank and a black bank, but nobody remembered who it was by, who had sung it and when. The cardinal point was fictitious, because the geography books, found to be guilty of faithfully showing the divisions made by history, had been burnt along with the history books. And using color to create a separation would seem to be lacking in originality and illogical as well. In fact how can black and white stripes be any different from white and black stripes? Yet there was a difference and a big one at that, as there is for a half-filled glass, which is half full for some and half empty for others.

Along the border of course was a no man's land, that is, the very thin invisible line that formed the border.

We don't know when, because since there was no longer any history there could be no time and since there was no longer any past there could be no future, because only the present existed. We don't know where from either, because the geography books had gone destroyed. One day, coming along this line from one direction (north, south, west, east) was a pretty blonde girl with blue eyes and a rosy complexion, which was astounding because the only colors were black and white on the one side and white and black on the other. Coming from the other side was a young athletic boy, with black hair and black eyes, and dark skin, which was just as strange because it was just one color. We don't know how they managed, but they continued towards the river walking exactly along the border line, which was no longer a no man's land, because they were there. The generals immediately issued the order to prepare for the worst. If just one of the two walked only millimeter away from the line which was imaginary, but which the two armies could see, all hell would break loose and the last of the wars would be unleashed.

The two reached the banks of the river of course. It was not very wide so they could look at each other closely. It didn't take long for them to take a liking to each other. They both lifted a foot at the same time to enter the water and reach each other. The soldiers had their fingers on the triggers of their machine guns, the cannon muzzles seemed to be biting their teeth impatiently, so eager were they to spit out fire on both sides. This eagerness was all the more keen because of the fact that nobody had ever fired a shot. Even the last war had gone lost with the memories, so it was very likely that nobody knew how to shoot anymore. The border line on the water was now even more invisible because of the two young people, but perfectly identified by highly sophisticated computer technology using infrablackwhite rays that guided the soldiers' eyes and hands.

Miraculously, the two newly-found lovers proceeded without ever leaving the line and reached the center of the river, without sinking into the water, because by walking on a no man's land, their feet were always on solid ground. Without meaning to, moved by impulse, they kissed. The kiss was so intense that it triggered a spark, or rather lightening, immediately followed by a sudden, very heavy downpour of rain. Something truly extraordinary had happened. In fact, it had not rained in the north-south-west-east and in the south-east-west-north for a long time ever since because there was no future and no past to refer to for the necessary statistics. And because of the eternal present it

had no longer been possible to predict the weather, and the various colonels signed on by the television channels for the weather forecasts had returned to their respective armies or had been placed in early retirement.

First, the two opposite line-ups looked at each other in the face, to see each other's reactions. A feeling of fear overwhelmed everybody: the water, which was coming down in buckets, was doing what countless centuries of showers and baths had not succeeded in doing. Both the black and white of one side and the white and black of the other side quickly trickled away. So a second miracle had taken place. The north-south-west-easterners saw the same thing that the south-east-west-northerners saw. Both the armies had equal proportions of men and women with blonde hair, blue eyes, a pale complexion and of men and women with dark hair, dark eyes and a dark complexion. As the black and white and the white and black trickled away, so did the border line that had been traced who knows when, who knows why, by who-knows-who, but definitely by somebody with a loveless color-blind heart.