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When troubles befell the people of Sumeria, skies darkened and for three score nights flames rose from the earth to be obscured by smoke and steam. The troubles moved from the south, and they came upstream along the two great rivers to cover the entire fertile valley. When the three-score nights passed nothing grew—nothing good that is, only weeds and pestilence.

To restore the daylight, a person of great purity had to first move through the waters below ground. To find the pure one, candles were passed under the chins of all 18 year-olds; their faces were shielded from the light and the one was revealed among the many. The purity of the one was revealed by the eyes, which shone through with the light from the candle. When the eyes shone a cry went out and all the candles in all of Sumeria were extinguished. In this dark land all were equally blind, and the one began his journey lit by a glow within. For this reason the Zhadi had raised their oldest child in each family to walk without seeing and to see without looking.

On this night a young woman is revealed to be the one. Shara's father suspected that his daughter would be the one. Atta Zhad believed she was the truest child he'd ever seen, and without any signs beyond his belief—in fact in the utter darkness of signs—he prepared her for the life of truth, the quest that only one person takes in the time when all others are blinded and the land is overrun by those from the south, north, east and west.

So the dark passage begins. Shara walks down the steps from her house and the ground opens to receive her. Caverns open and centuries of history are revealed to her. Ghost armies from every direction carrying the loot from armies before them. Ghosts on their sides, hanging from trees, chewing on leather. Ghosts with hats, braids, tunics, boots, horses, elephants and chariots. Treasure chests and guns, enormous vases filled with black gold, knives made of silver and jewels.

The ghosts are everywhere and she can not see the path. Every path that opens in one time is overrun by an army in another time. This is no time, she says, I have no time and I live without time, so I must walk through the ghosts to banish the armies. She steps through one ghost, then the next, and soon she is flowing like them toward the round building in the centre of the cavern.

This is the passage. She comes to the water gate. It is the first passage, the gate of water protected by enormous lips. Why the gate of water? This is a dry land. All the water has to pass below to come above. It comes around,

bending to form the round building with only one gate. Who can move the lips to open the gate? Others would speak, rage, curse the night. Shara knows this. She speaks not a word, presses the lips with her hand and the water gate falls open.

She comes to the white water. It flows upwards, up the rocks in a white froth. Any step into the white water brings not instant death but sudden blindness. It is white with rage and light. The rocks are not rocks but white bleached bones and skulls. There are no tight lips to press. Shara's toe sweeps the water. In every direction is only water, but in one there is a white skull. She steps onto this skull. It is a path of skulls decreasing in height until she is submerged but safe. Under the water the water is black, not white.

This is the still place of black water. She can walk no further, see no more. She feels a wall in the black water. There are no skulls, no ghosts, no gates nor knives, just an enormous wall that she simultaneously faces and stands upon. The wall has no name. The water goes no further. It presses upon the wall and the wall holds the world back. Nothing more can move and nothing is visible. This is the place of black water.

I have only three things here, Shara thinks. Three things. Water, darkness and the wall. Which of these can break the other? Which has the power? She pushes the wall and nothing happens. She cloaks the dark with her hand but it is no more or less dark. It is the water, she says. With her hand she fans the water, gently but surely. Time stands still, so she fans the water against the wall for many years. Eventually there is a pit, then a crack. A small crevice opens, large enough for a knife, though she does not have one. The crevice widens and soon a stream begins to flow.

Water is the universal solvent. The stream becomes a river and the wall begins to crack. This is the passage: the water gate, the white water, and then the black water. The world begins to crack open. Sometimes words are not enough. Sometimes lips cannot be made to move. Sometimes only the hand will do. And so Shara Zhade begins to crack the world apart. The water begins to flow, and the armies to tremble. The rivers break open, the crescent begins to flood, darkness gives way to light and the world can begin again.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Matias Viegner.