

She killed him in the morning, after breakfast.

They'd eaten the usual. Handfuls of cereal, consumed dry because they'd run out of powdered milk. A piece of beef jerky. Cold coffee. Miriam had ground the coffee beans with the mortar and pestle the night before, soaked them in water until dawn, then poured the tepid, bitter liquid into cracked mugs. She and Grant sipped in silence, then they left the shelter and followed a sandy path up the cliff to the graveyard.

Visiting the graveyard was Grant's morning ritual; Miriam followed him out of a long-standing habit. His jeans pockets bulged with seashells he'd collected on the beach, and now he leaned precariously on his cane as he dropped one shell on each grave. Miriam could tell which graves were older by the size of the shell piles: a huge heap of hundreds lay on the oldest grave while a neat stack of twenty shells rested on the newest. Twenty days since they'd buried Steven. Miriam fingered the lone shell stuffed in her shorts pocket and waited, patiently, until the stooped old man dropped his final token on the last shallow grave.

Grant straightened; his shaky hands gripped his cane as his legs trembled beneath him. He turned toward her, his mouth open, as if to ask a question. In a single, graceful motion she raised the knife and slit his throat. He fell, neat and soundless. She only caught a glimpse of the surprise in his eyes as he dropped, face-down, onto the sand.

It had taken no time at all. He hadn't expected it. And she felt nothing, now that it was done.

She retraced her steps to their shelter, grabbed a shovel and Grant's chisel, returned to the graveyard, and began to dig. She didn't stop digging until the sun rose high enough to momentarily blind her. She shielded her eyes with a steady hand and stared at the red sun dangling over the turbid sea. Blood-red, exactly the color of the liquid now spreading in the sand near her bare feet. What was it they used to say? *Red sky at morning, sailors take warning?*