

Funeral March

A Short Story by Celia Miller Pitt (350 words)
For Young Artists & Authors Showcase
Generation Rescue: Sustainable Water for All

You are walking along the beach, searching for a living seashell. The sand clings to your legs as you kneel down, sifting through the bottles and cans washed up on shore. All your hands bring up is glass and broken, off white, lifeless shells. You throw them back among the seaweed and muck and stand up again.

This morning, you wear rubber boots that sink in the sand. They're the well-made type—waterproof, expensive, necessary if you're walking on a dead beach. The water is contaminated with oil, sewage, and the skeletons of beached fish. No one walks here anymore — you've watched as the ocean died, recording the decline as your throat ached, as fewer and fewer of your colleagues stayed to search for life that wasn't there. The tattered remains of an umbrella wave in the wind.

Mussels, clams, snails. The pearls inside oysters used to be valuable, once, back when people cared. It seems childish now, grotesque. You let a shining pearl roll into the mud. You'd give anything for a live oyster.

The water swirls around, making the gray pebbles a kind of sandy gruel. When the ice vanished, when the salt in the ocean melted away, people came to the ocean, filling water jugs with free, cold, fresh water. When the fish began to die, they took those too — mourning over the bright, pretty reef fish, scooping dying animals back into the water — but when they became hungry, the seas drained of fish, they killed the last humpback whale, showing no mercy.

Starfish once climbed the rocks here, crushing, culling the last of shellfish, until they, too, dried out on the sand by the thousands. The corpses washed back into the sea.

You can hear the seals crying at night.

You shiver in your thin oilcloth suit. The cold blood of melted glaciers pools at your feet.

You take a moment to glance at the rising moon and look down, sifting slowly through the sand.

High tide rolls up to the hills as the cliffs crumble.