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3:48 in the afternoon was the prettiest time of the day but it wasn't quite the same after so many years. The leaves fell through the endless white haze. People floated through the streets like dust mites caught in yellow amber. Each day of their lives took place in perpetual autumn. Everyone had an appointment with her at 4:36 and there was no choice about attendance. Motherless, childless, sexless, unable to procreate, they knew not how they arrived or from where they had come. The only thing they absolutely knew, right down to their boiling blood, was that they would not be leaving.

The valley in which Ruin was situated was shaped like an elongated oval, beset by lush green hills. It was home to eighty thousand people. Perhaps 'people' is too generous a word for them. Merely the physical manifestations of the black souls of malevolent beings, the population of Ruin remained static while the faces changed and they put this down to her magic. Attendance at the daily 4:36 executions was compulsory but no one saw the early morning arrivals to Ruin, the number of which was kept equal to the amount of people executed the afternoon before. On their way through the city gates, these fresh arrivals were ritually cleansed in sand baths, a little grit remaining in the pores and blocking the tear ducts.

When the city's large screens weren't airing the demise of a black soul, it was Sakata rice cracker, tampon, furniture clearance and assorted financial institution commercials that played relentlessly and at high volume. The beer in Ruin was watered down and one frequently seemed to get the end of the keg. The food was tasteless and overcooked, the library's books had crucial pages missing, and the town's water was brown and fetid and came from the tap at a low pressure. The traffic lights flashed permanent amber, the town hall was never open and the restaurants were run by people who were of a different

nationality from the food they served.

Of course no one noticed these inconveniences of Ruin. They could no longer feel those tiny particles of sand lodged in their eyes for their eyes had long since been held by a single figure.

She lived on the eastern slope in a small farmhouse and she walked unguarded. When she stood atop the execution platform, the black souls of Ruin admired her beauty. Even though they could guess at the horror which she was about to unleash, they couldn't help but murmur about her high cheekbones and straight back, the ease with which she wielded any number of sharp instruments and how she never stopped smiling in the same distracted way. They felt like it was their eyes that she looked directly into even if they saw them only through the screen. Sometimes as she dealt out mortal blows, her face and gently smiling lips, dressed in spattered blood, would look up and all swore that they saw mercy in there. They would not believe that eyes so deep could take life with such ease.

It was she who kept them in Ruin. They passed the time, aware of their impending death but unable to leave the soft clutch of her power. Some of the people of Ruin even wished to prolong their life in Ruin so that they might see her every day while others, hoping that their day on the platform would soon come found themselves lamenting that they would never be able to see her again. They could not explain what it was she gave them, how it was she held them, and how the power of her sway did not diminish despite the horrible things she did to their fellow denizens of Ruin.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Declan Kelly.