

MOLLUSCA

Emily O'Malley FICTION

Dew pearly on the snail's shell. The early morning condensation was a signal from the sky; it was time to cross the barren-desert sidewalk. The snail might have wondered why it crossed its personal Sahara every morning, risking its life to trade dirt for dirt. The grass is always greener, the snail might have joked. Except the snail does not wonder or joke. It does not do anything at all but cross the sidewalk.

As the snail began its one-footed march, dew drooped down its whorls, oozing toward the soil. The damp dirt was slow to absorb, but just as sure as the snail inched forward, the dewdrop sank among the minerals.

Concrete is sharp, grainy. There are thin ridges, imperceptible to a human's soles, but rough to the snail's foot. It scratched and scraped.

From a distance, but steadily crescendoing, came thunderclaps. Still, the snail crawled.

A woman was out on a morning jog before the sun could begin to broil the day. Earbuds in, eyes focused on an ever-distant point that she ran toward, she was able to purge her mind of everything.

The snail crept toward the verge. Blades of grass rose up like an oasis—or mirage. One upper tentacle leaned slightly, its eye glancing toward a gigantesque monstrosity that seemed to be growing, though that could have been an illusion. If the snail had been capable, it may have pondered that distinction, or what the monumental thing meant for its existence.

But the snail merely moved along.

If the woman had looked at the ground, she might have seen the snail. As it was, though, the woman either did not look or did not care. She ran steadily closer. And closer. And closer. Until—

A crunch. The destruction of the shell, with its mantle and whorl. Heart, kidney, gut, lung, brain, all pierced by the shards of their former encasement and burst under the pressure. Foot, tentacles, mouth, eyes, all flattened to the cement.

If the woman's shoe made contact with the snail, if someone had been paying close enough attention to listen, this is what they would have heard.

But the snail, as it were, survived. It settled among the grass as the monstrous freak stormed past. Comfortable in the soft, damp dirt, it blinked slowly and retreated into its shell. Would it wonder about its close brush with an unknowable death? Would it tell the other snails, nestled in

the blades of grass, about the freakish creature? Would they laugh together about how outlandish it is to be so gargantuan, unable to feel the pleasure of a dewdrop underfoot?

Of course not. They are snails.



Emily O'Malley is an English major and writing minor. Their research interests include the intersection of race and gender in contemporary visual narratives and representations of mental illness in young adult literature. After publishing their personal essays in The Independent, Emily became the Editor-in-Chief of the campus magazine. They were a runner-up for the 2019 Stony Brook Short Fiction Prize, and the article they co-authored with Dr. Paul Reich has been included in the Winter 2021 issue of Popular Culture Review.

