

A Vagrant Hush of Snails Unfurling

Linda Kohler

We snuck in on the nape of a creature's reign: conical creatures, shells tapering up to a brownish or greenish peak – like mountains, but fingernail-small. Once scattered across this burnt ochre land's flat torso. Crammed along its water veins like navel-shaped jewels. They belonged.

We didn't. We were burrs on the land's stomach. In the time it took for us to prickle from the womb of our invasion on this place, the once-thriving mollusc had lived through its own dearth, witnessed its existence muddying, been declared extinct but secretly survived, hunkered down deep in a river, in stealth, guarded its fortune, made *itself* into a fortune, and finally been found. Clogging the water pipes of its oppressors. Unbuttoning its extinction with quiet teeth. Critically clasped in the land's wet nether, re-pointing, re-scrolling itself.

We arrived during the secret spell. The gone spell. Like the snail, we tended to hushes of sylvan riverbank, where we'd lie hidden like underwater surfaces. Unbuttoning ourselves. Quietly interlacing our limbs — with the thriving metropolis spiralling below us, its glory ricocheted above. He liked the lower curves of me. I liked to eat him up.

Sometimes we'd go to the land's bare midriff and pitch our tent in a nook, unravelling our bodies like sleeping bags in the dark. The skin of our union warm against the torso's veins. Our love viviparous to its scrabbly pulse, sung softly in silver tensions of stars. We'd wake curled against the hot dirt's bone-hard hip, our limbs damp tributaries, sheltered from the burning sky inside our canvas shell.

We were conical creatures, too. Slight disturbances could knock us sideways. Or turn us upside down and leave us teetering, our union muddying. Steal the ice cream from our top.

Once, I thought we would disappear. When we scaled our tallest peak and shouted about our extinction.

Our words crushed themselves mid-air, done and dusted like shell-grit, hurtling down the slope of our mutual displacement, loud and flowing and muddy, and then settled, and then clear. A river. We curled up together on the endless bank and satiated ourselves back into existence.

We were fingernail-small, our love a soundless wink in the land's vast nether. But we knew then; we had become like the tiny snail. Giant to the mountain we'd dislodged.

Works Cited

The author would like to acknowledge an article by Tim Low, from which she referenced information used in writing this piece, including the term ‘underwater surfaces’.

Low, Tim. “How an Endangered Species Is Clogging Our Pipes.” *Australian Geographic*, 22 March 2017, <https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/wildlife/2017/03/hanleys-river-snail-the-endangered-species-clogging-pipes/>.

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