

# Stepping On Snails

by Foster Trecost

Mildred Haufnaughten rarely rushed anywhere, but to see her hobble along in the fast-paced gait of someone in a hurry, one might think otherwise. She walked with quick steps, and a wobble at the top, but it had nothing to do with urgency; her movements had been choreographed for balance, not speed. A rain shower had passed an hour earlier, and she hurried down the sidewalk looking as though another threatened to come.

She stopped only when necessary, for to stop meant to start again, and starting again took effort. Thinking also took effort, so she tried not to think, because the least bit would collapse her coordination. If her mind wandered, it went only to where she was going, or perhaps to where she had been, but when she heard a familiar sound, it went somewhere else: to the past. At first, she was unsure what caused the sound, but she knew she had heard it before. She searched her memory, and found herself in a simple time; a single sound, which lasted less than a second, had made her a child. She found the memory, and dusty as it was, let it live again.

Rain had always brought anticipation; not of the storm itself, thrilling as they were, but rather for what came after. Millie raced from window to door and back again, waiting for the storm to stop, and when it did, and the sun had shone sufficiently enough, she bolted to the driveway in front of her house. Her eyes combed the cement as she hopped from one to the next, scarcely taking a step between jumps. With each landing, she would lose her balance laughing, and then jump again.

Her mother, hearing the giggles through an open window, would ask, "What you doing, Millie?"

"I'm stepping on snails," she yelled, "hearing them pop!" And then she jumped onto another, and another.

And so Mildred Haufnaughten lowered her head, but not in sorrow for her childhood pleasure, rather in search of another snail.

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She abandoned her fast-paced gait and proceeded at a snail's pace, seeking them out as she went. "Stepping on snails," she said through a smile. "Hearing them pop."

