

The Snail of the Mind is Trapped in His House

A fairy tale in the spirit of H.C. Andersen by Henrik Frederiksen, ©ElephantTribe.org

Down in the old manor garden, where the burdock leaves grew so large that a little child could easily stand out of the rain beneath them, lived a Snail. He was not just any snail, no, he carried a distinguished house on his back, and he possessed a mind that was even more distinguished. While the other little creatures of the garden were busy eating, spinning webs, or fluttering aimlessly about, this Snail was occupied with the greatest mysteries of the universe.

"The world is terribly superficial," the Snail said, stretching out one horn a little to feel the air. "Just look at the white butterfly. It flutters from flower to flower and lives only for the sweet nectar and the morning dew. It has no inner life. It does not *think*!"

"I," declared the Snail proudly, "contain a whole universe within my shell. The mind is the only true kingdom, and I am its ruler."

And with those words, he retreated into his beautiful, coiled house, curled up around his own clever thoughts, sealed the door with a little shining membrane of slime, and sank into his deep reflections.

The Cheerful Gossip of the Garden

Just outside the Snail's door, life went its noisy and fleeting way. It was midsummer, and the sun shone so blessedly.

A happy little Daisy, with a heart of gold and petals like white silk, turned her face toward the light.

"Good morning, you wise Snail!" called the Daisy, her voice ringing like fine drops of glass. "The sun is shining so beautifully today! A little Lark just sang a song right

above my head. Won't you come out and feel the warmth? It is truly glorious to be alive!"

The Snail fumbled about in the dark, and his voice sounded quite hollow from the innermost spirals.

"Warmth is merely a temporary state, little flower. Today you stand tall and proud, tomorrow the gardener's scythe will come and take your head. Why should I waste my time on the sun when I am currently unraveling the philosophical knot of existence? Leave me in peace with my thoughts."

The Daisy bowed her head a little sadly, but soon a mild wind came and tickled her leaves, and she forgot her sorrow and danced once more with the tall grass.

The days turned into weeks, and the weeks brought the cool, damp breath of autumn. The Snail retreated further and further into his house. He built mighty palaces of thought. He understood the changing of the seasons, he calculated the mathematics of the spider's web, and he

saw through the short, tragic life of the Lark. He understood everything, but he felt nothing.

The Heavy House

Late one evening, a fierce storm rolled in over the garden. The burdock leaves lashed against one another, and the rain fell in cold, heavy drops.

"Now I will step forward," thought the Snail. "The frivolity of the sun has passed. The garden is dark and quiet; it is fitting for a thinker of my rank to take a damp, solitary stroll."

He pushed against the inside of his house. But something was entirely wrong.

During the many months he had isolated himself, his body had grown stiff, and the shell—which had grown thicker from his own stagnation and sealed by layer upon layer of dried slime—had become hard as stone. The spirals of the house, which he had always praised as the

perfect architecture of the mind, had simply become too narrow.

He pushed harder. The little snail heart beat in a sudden, terrified rhythm.

"I must get out!" he thought in panic. "I must feel the rain on my horns! I must see if the little Daisy survived the summer!"

But the entrance would not yield. The snail of the mind was trapped in his own house. The very shell that had protected him from the world, the sanctuary where he had built his great intellectual kingdom, had become his prison.

In that dark, silent chamber, the Snail wept a single, invisible tear. All his grand thoughts and philosophical victories were worth nothing without the warmth of the sun or the cheerful greeting of a foolish little flower.

An Echo of a Thought

Many years later, a little boy from the manor was playing in the dirt beneath the withered burdock stems. He found a magnificent snail shell, bleached white by the winter snow and perfectly intact. It was strangely heavy and completely sealed.

"Look, Mother!" shouted the boy, running across the lawn. "I found a treasure!"

He held the beautiful snail shell up to his ear, expecting to hear the roar of the sea, as one does with conch shells from the beach.

"What does it say?" asked his mother, smiling.

The boy listened intensely, wrinkling his brow in childish concentration.

"It doesn't sound like the sea at all," whispered the boy.
"It just sounds like a small, sad wind, blowing round and round in circles, unable to find the door."

He put the silent snail shell in his pocket, and together they walked back into the warm, brightly lit living room, leaving the dark garden behind.