

Elizabeth Spires

Essential Snail

Slow.
That is the first thing
you should know
about me.
I'm slow.

~

Things I cannot do:
I cannot sing.
I cannot jump.
I cannot fly.

But why would I want to fly?

~

(To sing would be good
but who would listen?)

~

A few definitions:

~

House: a leaf over my head.

~

House: myself.

~

House: what I'll leave behind.

~

I confess: I,
like you,
have written
a poem or two.
Here's one:

*To tra-
verse the
peri-
meter.
To strad-
dle the
edge. And
not to
f
a
l
l
.
.
.
(!)*

~

Do you want
to hear a beautiful word?

Are you listening?

Are you *really* listening?

S l i m e.

~

Yesterday
dew on the leaves.
Today
dew on the leaves.
Tomorrow
dew on the leaves.
Is it enough?

~

Cloaked in myself,
I've read the Metaphysicals.
By being, just being, I pray.
Would Herbert say
I am a snail "well-drest"?

~

Days and nights!
Days and nights!

Moon and sun
whirling across

the sky and I,
little and low,

part of it all!

~

One way or another,

we all die.
Already, I see
how it will end:
Love, divine,
unknowable,
will pierce me
with an arrow.
I'll lie there,
completely finished,
a slain snail.

~

I watch you
watching me.

You watch me
watching you.

Eye to eye,
I'm at your mercy.

~~

Story of a Soul

Light. Light. Light. Light. Light.
 Streams into her rented room.
 A single smallish room, not even a closet,
 that's all she cares to live in.
 In one corner, a narrow cot
 with a nail hammered into the wall above it
 where she can hang her nightgown (or is it a dress?).
 On the table opposite, a bone china plate
 flanked by a spotless linen napkin and heavy old sterling,
 embossed with a double "S," without a speck of tarnish on it.
 But she eats like a bird when she eats at all—
 one oyster perhaps, or a single green grape
 washed down by a splash of *vin blanc*—
 amusing herself while she does by scribbling
 brief, enigmatical entries into her notebook:
Spent the morning writing postcards to G. Didn't send.
Am I on the right path? Identity crisis!
Or, Slept all day. Woke up wondering if B. was right,
that I am insubstantial. Groundless worry? Or not?
 The journal's deliberately cryptic.
 Her *real* autobiography, the one going on inside her,
 would be as thick as *War and Peace*
 but will never be written—she keeps a tight rein,
 deplores the trend to *confess*. But, oh yes,
 she's had her wild nights (hasn't everyone?),
 careening around the room like a bat out of Hades.
 Or worse, cast down on the floor, limp as an old rag rug.
 It was always (no surprise) about LOVE.
 Let the word be banished from the English language!
 For now, she prefers her nunnish quietude.
 Prefers letters to phone calls.
 Would like to disconnect the doorbell.

And if an imagined visitor—her landlady perhaps—
 were to ask, *But what exactly do you do all day?*

she would deflect the question as she always has.
And once whoever it was had left, she'd resume
her favorite pretend game, the one
where she's the mistress of a grand house,
the owner gone on a long, eternal trip.
Thinking about it, she smiles and plucks at the hem
of her flimsy dress (or is it a nightgown?)
and begins to quietly dust, then wipes all the windows
to a sheer clear transparency,
until everything is immaculate.