

SHELDON'S CROSSING

Written by

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And

Tom Dickinson

*Dedicated to the brave snails I try
desperately not to squish every time
it rains.*

1

EXT. A BACKYARD - SUNRISE

1

Magpie gossiping fills the cool autumn air as we descend on a backyard with all the trappings of Aussie suburbia:

A trusty barbie. A slowly rusting mower. An ancient clothesline. But, amidst this familiar snapshot lies-

A thriving realm-

A garden.

2

EXT. ATOP THE GARDEN'S BIRDBATH - THAT SAME MOMENT

2

Two snails stand sentinel. Drinking in the lightening garden before them. Their weather worn shells and wrinkled bodies reveal their age. PERRYWINKLE (65) and WORDSWORTH (73) have stood here many times before.

PERRYWINKLE

Perhaps He does not beckon to us
today Wordsworth.

WORDSWORTH

Perhaps not Perrywinkle.

An answer. Perhaps an unwanted one. The snails begin their long winding descent, heavy with the burden of it.

As though sensing this weariness the heavens themselves yield in response.

A lone drop of water PLINKS in the birdbath rippling outwards.

The two snails halt.

WORDSWORTH (CONT'D)

Or...perhaps He does.

Perrywinkle turns to Wordsworth forebodingly.

PERRYWINKLE

Send out Leaves to the young
Escargolytes at once Wordsworth.

He thrusts his arms out slowly. Wordsworth SIGHS with exasperation. Ever the performer that old Perrywinkle.

PERRYWINKLE (CONT'D)

Today another Crossing thus begins.

The garden itself seems to hold it's breath.

MUSIC CUE: GREAT SOUTHERN LAND by ICEHOUSE

Then, like a pin drop-

3 **EXT. SHELLHAVEN - MORNING** 3

-Autumn Leaves fall calmly over the sprawling city of Shellhaven. A thriving metropolis nestled safely within the ordered confines of the garden.

PLINK. A lone Leaf is struck off course by a raindrop. It diverges hurriedly from the rest, as though guided by fate. Or perhaps just the wind.

4 **EXT. SHELL WASH - MORNING** 4

The Leaf whirls over a busy Shell Wash where snails queue on conveyer belts that glisten with slime. Their shells are scrubbed and polished to a dazzling shine as they are rolled through banksia buffers.

5 **EXT. COFFEE CART - MORNING** 5

The Leaf blows past a streetside cart. Suited snails queue for their morning cup of Mulch. They flick through *'The Daily Slime'* in synchronisation. A few glance upwards at the disturbance as the Leaf whistles past their antennae.

6 **EXT. SNAIL MAIL ROUTE - MORNING** 6

The Leaf narrowly avoids a SNAIL MAIL EMPLOYEE pulling a cart overloaded with leaf-wrapped parcels. The cart swerves hitting a bump, spilling envelopes everywhere.

SNAIL MAIL EMPLOYEE
(stern)
Bloody Perrywinkle and his Leaves!

A snail nearby glides over to help clear the mess.

7 **EXT. BUSY ROAD - MORNING** 7

The Leaf weaves in and out of the packed traffic on the Slimeway. Snails grumble at the red light ahead. The Leaf is the only thing moving with any pace at peak hour.

8 **EXT. STREET CROSSING - MORNING**

8

Two surfy looking snails GARLEY (15) and GOTE (15) slide across the road leisurely, barkboards strapped atop their shells. They're oblivious to the impatient slimeway riders.

GARLEY

Duuude, the pond waves are gonna be wicked right before that storm hits.

GOTE

It's gonna be gnarly Garley.

Garley and Gote rise up on their tails and bodyslam their slimey bellies, sending the Leaf careening off once more in a wicked tumble.

9 **EXT. CARNIVAL GROUNDS - MORNING**

9

The Leaf slows its tumble to a peaceful drift as it skirts over a large field beginning to bustle with activity.

Marquees are being raised. Lines drawn for a race track. Wheelbarrows cart in food and other goods. Snails working around the clock to pull together a big event.

10 **EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN - MORNING**

10

The Leaf is drawn further away from the city, as though in answer of a summons. Towards the outer edge of the garden the houses and other buildings become sparser.

Tucked behind a Bird's nest fern lies a lone house, a little rundown but obviously a labour of love. The Leaf comes to rest at it's front door.

Music drifts invitingly out of an upstairs window where the curtains are drawn back, welcoming us into-

11 **INT. A BEDROOM - MORNING**

11

A messy teen's sanctuary. Dead flowers and punk rock band posters (Slink-182, Slime Chemical Romance) adorn the walls.

GREAT SOUTHERN LAND plays on the radio - till it ends.

Amongst this vortex of teenage angst-

A shell.

Uncanny in it's beauty. A mesmerising image. But only an image.

Poised before the shell, reflected in a mirror: SHELDON (16), a gallant, young gastropod.

He lingers a moment too long. Sheldon's expression is hard to read, but it's certainly not one of hubris. We're intruding on a private moment; Prying beneath the Shell.

A voice from down the hall intrudes on this introspection.

A TENDER VOICE (O.S.)
Sheldon hun, are you up yet? A
Leaf's come for you darling!

Seized with a sudden vigour, Sheldon slurps forward, leaving the shell behind.

The illustrious image is shattered, and in its place: gangly teenage awkwardness.

Cheeks ruddy and breath ragged, he surges towards his bedside table to open a cluttered draw of his most precious things.

- 'Slogger's Stars' trading cards dogeared from use
- A near empty box of tissues
- A limited edition Sir Stanley 'Steadfast' snail action figure
- Half a browning apple
- A unopened pack of condoms

Sheldon SNATCHES the tissues. SLAMS the draw shut.

Gently, he shifts aside a well-loved book splayed atop the dresser. It's some sort of religious manifesto.

Beneath the book is the prize he seeks-

'Slyders's Slyme- Helping sun-baked snails feel GOOEYORGEIOUS since 1973' quips a desiccated snail on the front of the well-used tin.

The voice drifts in again. Closer this time.

A TENDER VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Sheldon lovey, did you hear me? Do
you need me to come up there?

SHELDON
I'm *fine*. I'll be down in a sec!

Sheldon slathers great globs of slime with a practiced hand.

A loud, WET SQUELCH.

He turns to face the shell, raking over it with the eyes of a wolfish lover.

The voice is back again. Unbearably close this time.

A TENDER VOICE (O.S.)
Sheldon...

Sheldon SUCKS IN with gusto.

13

INT. HALLWAY - THAT SAME MOMENT

13

SHELLY-ANNE (53), the type of mum who always cuts the crusts off without being asked. Sporting a portly yet comely looking shell, knocks tentatively on Sheldon's door.

SHELLY-ANNE
...Are you alright in there? Do you
need a hand?

Through the door, we hear loud SQUELCHING, MUMBLING and PANTING.

SHELDON SNR (51), a no-frills shell, imposing in the lines of life etched into its exterior. Always falling asleep on the couch and saying "*I wasn't sleeping, I was just resting my eyes*". He join's Shelly-Anne.

They share a look. A silent battle of wills familiar to any loving long term partnership.

SHELDON SNR
We can't keep helpin' the boy. He's
sizteen for Slogger's sake Shelly-
Anne. He's gotta learn on his own.

SHELDON (O.S.)
(muffled straining)
I'm fine...I do...myself.

SHELLY-ANNE
You knew what we were signing up
for when we took him in. Go in and
help him, he needs his father.

SHELDON SNR
He's nearly a grown snail now he
can work it out 'imself. I 'ad to.

SHELDON (O.S.)
 (straining)
 Ughhh...Mum...Help!

Shelly-Anne's motherly instincts activate. She bursts open the door, THWACK!, revealing-

14 **INT. A BEDROOM- THAT NEXT MOMENT**

14

-Sheldon.

Stuck in the shell.

Head first, slimy ass out, still wiggling.

The last position a teenage boy wants his mum (step mum) to find him in.

HARD CUT TO:

15 **INT. A KITCHEN - LATER THAT MORNING**

15

An exquisitely painful tableau. The family sits in LOUD SILENCE around the long wooden table.

A beautiful feast sits before them, prepared with love for what was supposed to be a momentous day.

SHELLY-ANNE
 We praise Sloggers for this
 nourishing meal.

SHELDON SNR
 Praise be Sloggers

SHELDON
 (half-heartedly)
 Praise be Sloggers.

Shelly-Anne reaches out a tender hand to pat Sheldon on his slimy, shell-less back. He shrugs away from her touch.

SHELLY-ANNE
 Oh love, you should have told us ow
 tight it was getting. We could have
 gotten a new one made for you.

Sheldon Snr GRUNTS in agreement.

SHELDON SNR
 (pleased)
 Nohin' to be done about it now.
 You'll just have to do the Crossing
 next year.

Sheldon Snr and Shelly-Anne share a look of relief. This breaks Sheldon out of his moping.

SHELDON

NO! You've already held me back
later than everyone else! They all
think I'm too scared to go

SHELDON SNR

There's no shame in completing the
Crossing a little later son.

SHELDON

Easy for you to say. You did it at
thirteen. I'm 16 and three
Quarters! I can look after myself.

SHELDON SNR

You're not going out unprotected. I
won't 'ave it.

SHELDON

And why not! That's the way you
found me. Maybe Slogger's never
gave me a Shell for a reason.

The parents exchange a worried look. The conversation veering into a routine spot of soreness for them all.

SHELLY-ANNE

Oh love. Don't let Perrywinkle get
to you. He's a stubborn old snail
is all. You know what they're like.

A pointed look at her husband, who softens in response. Riled up, Sheldon misses all this.

SHELDON

Yeah? Well maybe he's right. Maybe
I just need to face the fact I'm
never going to be a normal snail.

SHELLY-ANNE

Sheldon love-

Shelly-Anne's retort is interrupted by a DING! at the door.

Saved by the bell. Sheldon slips off before his parents can protest. Their shelled bodies no match for the speed of his new lithe form.

16

INT. FRONT DOOR - MORNING

16

Sheldon not familiar with his rapidly-changing body, slides past the door, overshooting his target, missing the frame completely.

He positions himself in front of the door, opens it, revealing--

REVERSE ANGLE: Sheldon... All of Sheldon... Too much Sheldon. He's beaming.

--LILITH (15), Sheldon's best friend. Her gorgeous caramel shell encasing an even sweeter heart within.

LILITH

Oh! Shel..

(eyes widen)

Sheldon! Ummm... Hi! Is this a bad time?

SHELLY-ANNE (O.S.)

Who is it? Is that Lilith?

SHELDON

(clueless, hurried)

No this is the perfect time, let's go.

Sheldon hurries out the door, grabbing Lilith on the way. But she's fixed, frozen.

They are closer than they've ever been... Literally.

Lilith tries hard to look anywhere but at her naked friend.

LILITH

(embarrassed)

Uhhhhh... Sheldon...?

SHELDON

(still clueless)

What?

(looks down)

Ahhhhh!

Sheldon retreats back inside, seeking cover behind the door. Any lasting bravado deserts him.

SHELDON (CONT'D)

Ju-just go! I'll meet you there!

Lilith doesn't move. Speechless.

Sheldon peeks his antennas around the door to check that she is gone. Nope.

SHELDON (CONT'D)
(to himself)
IDIOT!

LILITH/SHELLY-ANNE (O.S.)
(In unison)
Sorry?

Shelly-Anne seems to materialise out of thin-air.

SHELDON
(startled)
Mum!

LILITH	SHELLY-ANNE
Sheldon? Are you okay?	What's wrong love?

SHELDON
(a mind ran dizzy)
No-I-Not you...

Sheldon gathers himself. He gives his mum the look. *Play it cool.*

SHELDON (CONT'D)
(through clenched teeth)
Muuuum.
(to Lilith)
I'll just meet you at the Crossing!

SHELLY-ANNE
The Crossing? You're not really
going are you darling?

LILITH (O.S.)
What? Why wouldn't he be?

Shelly-Anne pops her antennas around the door.

SHELLY-ANNE
Oh Lilith! I thought it was you.
Don't just leave her at the door
Sheldon. Come on in love!

Sheldon gives the look again. *You're ruining my life.*

Lilith steps in with a coy smile. Trying not to look.

LILITH
 Hi Shelly-Anne, how are you?
 (an after-thought,
 scriptlike)
 Praise Be Sloggers.

SHELLY-ANNE
 I'm well, dear. Praise be.

Sheldon is shell-shocked by the domesticity of it all.

LILITH
 What's this about Sheldon not doing
 the Crossing?

SHELLY-ANNE
 Sheldon's grown out of his shell
 again. I don't know where he puts
 it all. He's been eating so much
 lately.

Lilith's eye flit to Sheldon. Sheldon shrinks in disbelief,
 but they're talking about him, not to him.

This couldn't get any worse...

SHELDON SNR (O.S.)
 What's all this ruckus about! I'm
 tryin' to read me paper!

17 SCHLURP, SCHLURP, SCHLURP.

17

Sheldon Snr, feeling left out, saunters on in.

SHELDON SNR
 (acting surprised)
 Lilith!

LILITH
 Morning Sir Sheldon. Praise Be
 Sloggers.

SHELDON
 (groaning)
 Don't call him that

SHELDON SNR
 (clearly chuffed with this
 address)
 Nah, nah, none of that funny
 business. Just call me 'Don'
 remember.

SHELDON
 (groans)
 Daaaad.

LILITH
 (giggles)
 Of course 'Don'.

SHELDON SNR
 I know youse two were all excited
 about doin' the Crossing together,
 but you'll 'ave ta go without 'im.
 I won't 'ave 'im goin' out
 unprotected.

Lilith reads the room. She's not a silly snail.

LILITH
 ...Well surely you'll at least all
 come to see me off? Mum didn't feel
 up to it... It's always tough this
 time of year... With dad not here
 and all..

A look passes between Sheldon Snr and Shelly-Anne. Sheldon
 and Lilith share a look of their own.

SHELLY-ANNE
 Hmm... maybe we should dear.

SHELDON SNR
 I just don't it's a good idea with
 Sheldon being so vulnerable.

Sheldon shrinks again. Lilith notices.

LILITH
 -I hear they're finally unveiling
 the new statues this year.

Sheldon Snr perks up.

Lilith is not a silly snail.

SHELDON SNR
 Oawahh... Well...
 (glances at Shelly-Anne)
 I guess we could come send ya
 off... Out of respect for ya old
 man of course.

SHELLY-ANNE

Yeah it'll be good for Sheldon to
see how it all happens. For next
year of course.

Sheldon looks like he could almost kiss Lilith. She knows.

18

EXT. CARNIVAL GROUNDS - MORNING

18

A bustling carnival ground. Brightly coloured banners droop under beads of morning dew. A BRASS BAND blares a lively patriotic tune: trumpet snails, trombone snails, a tuba-shell thumping deep- MARCH OF THE ANZACS.

Stalls line the mossy stretch, manned by decorated VETERAN SNAILS with cracked shells, selling faded ribbons and dented badges for 'good luck'. A snail in a hi-visibility vest slowly adjusts a banner that reads: "PRAISE BE SLOGGERS".

Colourful stalls burst with games: "TOSS THE SEED POD", "FASTEST SLIME RACE". Prize booths glitter with shiny pebbles and polished shell pins.

Hiding around the corner of a small tent, a game of two-up is being played. Four veteran snails watch on as a coin is tossed up into the air.

A SNAIL BARKER tosses raffle tickets into a box.

SNAIL BARKER

Step right up! First ticket drawn
gets the honour of leading this
year's Crossing!

Joy and anticipation ripple through the slime-slicked ground.

Sliding smugly through it all- Perrywinkle approves of this years festivities. With Wordsworth by his side, snails young and old acknowledge their passing.

YOUNG SNAIL

Praise be Sloggers!

OLD SNAIL

Praise be, Sir's.

WORDSWORTH

Praise be, my dear snails.

Wordsworth alone acknowledges them in return.

PERRYWINKLE

A fine turn out. Perhaps this Crossing would make for a worthy retirement.

WORDSWORTH

Perhaps. But my heart tells me Sloggers has plans for me yet.

PERRYWINKLE

Sloggers demands much from one so... experienced.

WORDSWORTH

Yet it does not fall upon us to question, but only to try interpret Slogger's will.

PERRYWINKLE

And how ever would we do it without you and your commandments dear Wordsworth.

WORDSWORTH

Sloggers' commandments. Do not be disheartened Perrywinkle, I shall only retire when a young snail is ready to take my place.

Perrywinkle attempts to take this information in his slide.

Nearby, a CHOIR OF YOUNG SNAILS full of a naïve pride practice a hymn.

CHOIR OF YOUNG SNAILS

Slide and glide the Crossing's here/ Shells held high, let's give a cheer!/ Through the rain and through the sun/ Slogger's guide us, one by one!

One choir snail coughs dramatically and keels over. The CHOIR DIRECTOR rolls their eyes.

CHOIR DIRECTOR

Someone get Gary back in line!

The sharp BANG!!!! Of a starting gun.

A crowd dressed in their Sunday best watches on intently. Sweeping through the cheering crowd, some snails wave tickets high into the air as if their lives depend on it.

We focus in on two proud parents in the crowd: 'GOGGS' (53) and 'SHAZZA' (53).

GOGGS
GO YOU SON-OF-A-GUN!

SHAZZA
SHOW EM WHAT YA MADE OF!

20

EXT. RACETRACK - SAME TIME - ALL IN SLOWMO

20

Eight strapping young snails surge down a racetrack. Their sweaty, slimy bodies contract like a rubber band in slow motion. Faces strained from absolute exertion.

The snail in lane four, PODDRICK (15), mirror image of his father, inches out in front of the pack to take the lead. He sneaks a look back to his competition and sees he has the win. He looks up towards the crowd and the two snails from before.

GOGGS
THAT'S MY BOY!!!

Poddrick flashes them a wide shit-eating grin.

MATCH CUT TO:

21

INT/EXT. AWARDS TENT - LATER

21

CLICK! A camera flashes, illuminating Poddrick's wide shit-eating grin.

We zoom back to see he sports a metallic gold beer bottle cap atop his shell. Beside him two other young snails sport similar (but much less impressive) caps. A SNAIL PHOTOGRAPHER motions for them to strike their best pose.

SNAIL PHOTOGRAPHER
Alright boys, one more group shot
for the Daily Slime. Say 'dew'.

YOUNG SNAILS
Dewwwwwww.

CLICK! Satisfied the photographer starts packing down his equipment.

SNAIL PHOTOGRAPHER
 Lovely stuff boys. May Slogger's
 bless you all on your Crossing.

Goggs and Shazza emerge from a corner of the tent where they'd been eagerly awaiting to congratulate their boy. They smother Poddrick between their slimy bodies, slurping him with wet kisses.

SHAZZA
 (between kisses)
 We're so proud of you, you're first
 ever win! And the day of the
 Crossing too, oh what a blessing
 from Slogger's!

Poddrick attempts to wriggle out of their grasp.

PODDRICK
 Muuum. Daaad, get off-

GOGGS
 What an omen! My boys gonna have
 the best Crossing any snails ever
 seen.

Poddrick finally manages to escape. He's covered in marks from Shazza's lippy which he rubs at self-consciously.

PODDRICK
 Ahh wasn't much of a competition
 without Sheldon here.

GOGGS
 Nonsense! You should have seen how
 fast you were, that track was
 yours.

PODDRICK
 Yeah, whatever. Anyways where even
 is-

Poddrick is interrupted by a bunch of young snails entering the tent. They are led by a haughty snail, MOLLY (15) who seems well aware of her striking shell and the effects it has on others.

MOLLY
 Here he is, the Podster, finally
 got your win did ya?

Poddrick cracks a cheeky grin.

PODDRICK

Keep dreaming Molly, and maybe one day you'll be as quick as me.

MOLLY

You and Sheldon are just lucky they don't let us girls race against ya's. I'd leave youse both in the dust.

PODDRICK

Are you two listening to this nonsense?

Poddrick addresses the snails flanking Molly. SHELLIOT (15) lingers to one side, looking like at any moment he might just retreat into the shell that appears about five sizes too big for his lanky body. ROCKWHILE (15) adjusts his glasses, before continuing to fiddle with some sort of contraption in his hand.

ROCKWHILE

Well. We watched the race. I calculated you were 0.89 slurps off your average pace. To be expected with no Sheldon to set the pace.

Molly laughs.

PODDRICK

Thanks guys it's really great to have such supportive friends.

SHELLIOT

(squeaky)

I think you did great!

ROCKWHILE

Shelliot spent most of the race inside his shell because he thought he saw a leech.

SHELLIOT

I swear it looked right at me!

ROCKWHILE

It's statistically improbable that such blood sucking demons exist. They're merely a fabrication by parents to get young snails to behave.

SHELLIOT

I-I. Maybe it was just a shadow.

MOLLY

Lay off him alright. You don't know everything genius.

ROCKWHILE

I was merely pointing out that such myths about 'vampires' are likely-

PODDRICK

Hey guys, Lilith wasn't watching the race with you was she?

They pause their disagreements to all look at him with a hint of pity.

SHELLIOT

Sorry Pod, I haven't see her.

ROCKWHILE

Sheldon appears to be missing from the festivities too.

PODDRICK

It's not like him. He's been waiting for this day forever. Where the hell is he?

22

EXT. OUTSIDE 'THE GREAT SHELL' - THAT SAME MOMENT

22

The Great Shell. Able to host mighty congregations. The intricate swirls decorating its exterior are a familiar sight, we saw their replica on Sheldon's shell this morning.

Shells of shapes and sizes shuffle in.

Perrywinkle greets them personally at the entrance. His extravagant religious garb bathes him in an air of celebrity. Though a priest by trade Perrywinkle truly was born for the stage.

Sheldon, Lilith and his parents join the crowd milling towards the doors. It's hard to discern any clear conversation amidst the babble of excited young snails and their proud parents.

Sheldon can't believe his eyes. *It's really happening- The Crossing.* He looks down at his shell less form. *Not quite as expected though.*

Beside him, Lilith senses his trepidation.

LILITH
It's okay Sheldon, no one is
looking at you.
(beat)
Seriously, look up.

She's right. Today is a day of celebration and everyone is
too caught up in the festivities to worry about him.

SHELDON
Thanks Lil.

LILITH
I haven't done anything yet.

SHELDON
For before. For not being weird
about...

Sheldon gestures to his *au naturel* form.

LILITH
That's okay.
(giggles)
It's pretty closed to what I
pictured anyways.

She's been picturing me...?

SHELDON
Uhhh...Thanks?

LILITH
(blushing)
Not that I picture you often...
It's just that-I-I wonder someti-
It's not like...um...yeah...

Awkward silence. Lilith recalibrates.

LILITH (CONT'D)
Anyways! You're not in there yet!
I'm worried what Perrywinkle will
say about you going shell less.

SHELDON
Oh that'll be fine. I got a Leaf
this morning.

LILITH
(surprised)
You did?

SHELDON

Yep. He won't say no. It's mum and dad I have to convince.

This grabs Sheldon Snr's attention.

SHELDON SNR

Don't think I'm so deaf now I can't hear you two scheming right in front of me. Just because I let you come to the ceremony, doesn't mean I've changed my mind about the Crossing. It's too dangerous. We've come to see the lovely Lilith off and that's it.

LILITH

But Sir Sheldon-

SHELDON SNR

I adore the flattery lovely Miss Lilith but I really won't be changing my mind on this. Sheldon's safety is too important to me and his mother.

SHELLY-ANNE

That's right love.

SHELDON

Then why even bring me here? You know I can't go inside if I'm not doing the Crossing.

Sheldon Snr smiles mischievously.

SHELDON SNR

Now for most snails that certainly is the case. But they didn't name your father 'The Don' for no good reason. That name carries weight son. Take notes.

Sheldon flashes Lilith a sceptical look but she just shrugs, smiling- clearly entertained by whatever is about to go down.

They have made it now to the front of the queue, Perrywinkle stands as the final check between Sheldon and the ancient doors of the Great Shell. Foreboding lies heavy in the air.

Perrywinkle greets them with a practiced mask of civility. His eyes skirt across Lilith, then Sheldon's parents before finally resting on Sheldon in a look of barely disguised shock.

Before he can say a word 'The Don' slides forward with the confidence of one who could charm the skin off any snake.

'THE DON'

Perrywinkle! ...Sir. It's been a while, hasn't it? Cracking day to be back here for a Crossing. I remember when you ran Shelly-Anne and I's big day. Seems like only yesterday doesn't it? You don't look like you've aged a day mate.
(cheeky nudge)

There must be something magic in those priest robes of yours hey.

PERRYWINKLE

Good Morning Sheldon, Shelly Anne. Such a... pleasure as always to be greeted by your cheery countenance.

SHELLY ANNE

Praise be Sir Perryinkle.

LILITH

Praise be!

SHELDON

Praise be Sir.

PERRYWINKLE

Praise be young escargolytes.
(beat)

I regret any rudeness, but what exactly is the purpose of you and the boy's visit today? I am a busy snail and any enquiries must wait until the Crossing has passed.

'THE DON'

No offence taken here, I know you're a busy snail. Don't worry little Sheldon here won't be taking part this year, not without his shell, we we're just hoping to sneak on in to farewell the lovely Lilith here. What with her mum out of commission and all... and her father... it doesn't seem right that she should have no one to send her off. I'm sure you understand that as High Priest and all. Sloggers is all about the importance of community, isn't he.

PERRYWINKLE

Slogger's is also the champion of duty and order.

'THE DON'

Exactly and it's my duty to help Lilith-

PERRYWINKLE

And as such it is *my* duty to inform you that it would be a grave insult on all our parts to let your boy enter as such into the Great Shell. No snail has ever entered before his Crossing day, and to think we should break such a sacred rule for *him*. I thought a celebrated figure of the Crossing such as yourself would know better, Sir Sheldon.

Sheldon Snr and Shelly Anne are stunned into silence at the change in Perrywinkles tone.

PERRYWINKLE (CONT'D)

Sheldon will be summoned to the Crossing when it is deemed he is worthy. Lilith you may enter now. If you wish to debate this matter further it will have to be after the Crossing, I have no time for such frivolities any longer.

Lilith eyes begin to simmer with rage but it is Sheldon who steps forward, nervously.

SHELDON

But...but Sir...You sent me a Leaf this morning.

PERRYWINKLE

Nonsense. I did no such thing.

Sheldon holds out the Leaf from this morning. Perrywinkle struggles to conceal the rage building at the sight of it. Sheldon Snr snaps out of his shock at the sight of his son holding his slimy body high against Perrywinkles fierce glowering.

SHELDON SNR

You did.

He takes the Leaf from Sheldon shoving it towards Perrywinkle.

SHELDON SNR (CONT'D)
And this Leaf here proves it.

SHELDON SNR (CONT'D)
My son will be doing the Crossing
this year. Slogger's has willed it.
And there's nothing you can say
about it.

SHELLY ANNE
Love, I don't think-

SHELDON SNR
No Shelly Anne. He's old enough
now. And he's strong enough. He's
one of the quickest snails
Shellhaven has ever seen. We can't
hold him back forever.

Sheldon has grown even taller, beaming proudly at his fathers
words of praise.

PERRYWINKLE
Leaf or no Leaf, I cannot allow it.
The boy is without his Shell, it
defies our very nature. What would
Slogger's make of this insult? I am
only protecting the boy from
further humiliation.

SHELDON SNR
The only one about to be humiliated
right now is you.

The snails behind them in line begin to catch wind of the
commotion in front. The sounds of the crowd grow quiet as
snails strain to see what is going on.

Perrywinkle attempts to regain control of the rising tempers.

PERRYWINKLE
Let's take this discussion aside so
we can all calm down and reach a
reasonable solution.

SHELDON SNR
My son is doing the Crossing that
is the only solution I'll hear.

SHELLY ANNE
Love, lets not get worked up.
Perrywinkle is just trying to help.

PERRYWINKLE

Perhaps you should listen to your wife. She speaks with much wisdom.

SHELDON SNR

Perhaps you should get-

The ancient doors of the Great Shell swing inward with a great grinding CREAK. Sheldon strains his head for a look inside but Wordsworth blocks his view, slipping through a crack before they CLANG shut behind him.

WORDSWORTH

I noticed a slow in the proceedings. Slogger's awaits. Has something happened Perrywinkle.

PERRYWINKLE

Everything is under control here Wordsworth. You may return to-

SHELDON SNR

My son is being denied entry! He's of age and he's got his Leaf right here.

Sheldon Snr hands Wordsworth the Leaf. Wordsworth takes his time to inspect it.

WORDSWORTH

This all appears to be in order.

PERRYWINKLE

Look at the boy. He can't do the Crossing like *that*. It's an insult to Slogger's. An insult to all the snails of Shellhaven.

Wordsworth peers up from the Leaf to look at Sheldon, seeming to only take him in properly now for the first time. He lifts an eyebrow but shows no other outward signs of surprise. Wordsworth notices Lilith standing firmly to Sheldon's side, as though ready to go into battle for him.

WORDSWORTH

Lilith dear, it's wonderful to see you here. It's truly a joy to see what an admiral young snail you have become. Your father would have loved to see this day.

LILITH

(somewhat surprised)
Th-thankyou Sir Wordsworth.
(MORE)

LILITH (CONT'D)

I hope to do him proud. May
Sloggers rest his Shell.

WORDSWORTH

May Sloggers rest his Shell.

(beat)

Do you feel ready to take on the
Crossing?

LILITH

I think so, Sir.

(glances at Sheldon)

I know I'll be doing it with some
of the best snails of Shellhaven
beside me.

Wordsworth nods in acknowledgement. He then turns to Sheldon.

WORDSWORTH

And do you feel ready to undertake
the Crossing, young Escargolyte?

Sheldon looks to his parents who nod at him encouragingly.

SHELDON

I-I do Sir. I'm ready.

Wordsworth nods, holding Sheldons gaze a moment before
turning towards Perrywinkle.

WORDSWORTH

There is no creed in the
commandments that prohibits a snail
from Crossing without a shell.
Sloggers will be the one to
determine his worthiness, not us.
Let them pass.

Sheldon smiles, the first proper smile we have seen from him
so far. Sheldon Snr rests his hand on his shoulder proudly.

Perrywinkle merely turns to the next snails in line, not
granting them the satisfaction of a hint of his displeasure.

Wordsworth motions for them to enter but puts his arm out to
stop Lilith.

WORDSWORTH (CONT'D)

If you wouldn't mind sparing an old
snail a moment dear?

LILITH

Sir Wordsworth?

WORDSWORTH

There's a small matter I wish to discuss with you. Then you can join the rest of these fine snails inside.

SHELDON SNR

We can wait right here for her.

LILITH

It's alright. I'll meet you guys inside.

SHELLY ANNE

Are you sure love?

LILITH

I'll be fine!

Sheldon is rooted to the spot, worried for his friend. But his parents are satisfied and hurry him on through the great ancient doors. They CREAK open once more before grinding shut with a resounding CLANG. His last glimpse that of Wordsworth leading Lilith away.

23

INT. THE GREAT SHELL - MOMENTS LATER

23

Sun streams through the glass-stained windows, washing over the gathering of snails in a resplendent light.

Sheldon shuffles in behind his parents, hiding behind their shells like he's five years old again.

His movements are the timid slides of an explorer treading unknown territory. No snail is allowed in the Shell until the day of their Crossing.

Sheldon nudges his mum.

SHELDON

Everyone's staring at me. I don't look that weird do I?

Shelly-Anne and Sheldon are lost in thoughts of their own Crossing.

SHELLY-ANNE

(eyes ahead)

Huh lovey?

SHELDON SNR
 You'll be right son, take it all
 in. There's nothing like the first
 time inside.

Sheldon feels more isolated than ever.

SHELLY-ANNE
 I'm feeling a bit emotional hun. I
 forgot just how big it was.

SHELDON SNR
 I remember it like it was
 yesterday, it was the most
 impressive thing I'd ever seen.
 (flirty)
 Till I laid eyes on you of course.
 Come 'ere.

Sheldon Snr embraces Shelly-Anne like a love drunk teen.
 Sheldon gets caught in the crossfire.

Get me out of here!

He wriggles his way out, bursting into an open space. His
 eyes widen as he takes in...

24

THE RICH HISTORY WITHIN THE GREAT SHELL

24

Majestic banners hang from tall ceilings.

Signed frames and memorabilia adorn the walls.

THE COLOSSAL STATUES OF SLOGGER'S STARS line the hallway,
 creating a path that leads deeper into The Great Shell.

Sheldon stops to marvel at a familiar face. He checks the
 plaque...

...it can't be...

THE STATUE OF SIR STANLEY 'STEADFAST', a determined snail in
 action: "I don't care if your shell's made of solid gold,
 it's what's beneath that counts."

Sheldon struggles to contain his excitement.

SHELDON
 Dad! DAD! Look who it is!

Like a kid lost in a woolies, Sheldon looks ups and finds his
 parents are nowhere to be seen.

A few snails in the crowd, turn to stare. Sheldon, suddenly naked and afraid, seeks refuge behind his hero SIR STANLEY.

Why did they leave me all alone?

25

INT. THE GREAT SHELL - FOYER - SAME MOMENT

25

HIGH ANGLE- from the top of the balcony. The foyer below is a sea of shells in good spirits, except one: Sheldon.

Perrywinkle stares down at the scene before him, brooding.

WORDSWORTH (O.S.)
Perrywinkle.

Behind him Wordsworth appears in the hall. Perrywinkle blinks out of his thoughts.

WORDSWORTH (CONT'D)
It is time.

26

INT. THE GREAT SHELL - HALLWAY - MORNING

26

Oblivious to Sheldon's absence, Shelly-Anne and Sheldon Snr are sliding down memory lane when...

A VOICE IN THE CROWD (O.S.)
That's not 'the Don', is it?

The two lovebirds whip their heads towards...

...'GOGGS' (53), Sheldon Snr's right hand man. A rough-around the-edges shell. Never quite grew out of his 'class clown' title.

...'SHAZZA' (53), Goggs' wife. She's had a bit of work done. Clearly wears the pants in this marriage, Goggs doesn't even own a pair.

GOGGS
What'd Perrywinkle have to pay you
to show up 'ere!

SHELDON SNR
Clearly not enough. Didn't know
they we're letting the likes of you
in this joint.

Sheldon Snr and Goggs embrace. They clearly go way back.

SHELLY-ANNE
 Aren't you looking lovely Shaz.
 Wish my shell still looked like
 that. You're glowin'.

Shelly-Anne and Shaz exchange kisses.

SHAZZA
 (raspy)
 Thanks darl, it better be lookin'
 good. Cost me a pretty penny.

SHELDON SNR
 If there letting anyone in 'ere,
 where are the rest of 'em at then?

Goggs flashes a cheeky grin. *This is gonna be trouble.*

MUSIC CUE: MONEY FOR NOTHING by DIRE STRAITS [1:40], the
 ultimate introduction

IN SLOW MOTION: Three absolute dads strut through the crowd:

-ESSY (53), always sporting a freshly waxed shell, with all
 the latest embellishments. Lives for work (and somehow likes
 it), and never shuts up about how 'Slime is money!'.

-SPEEDY MCGEE (53), Truly a sight for sore-eyes. The punching
 bag for the group but with his hot wife and 6 kids, he
 doesn't mind- he knows he's won 'the lotto'.

-SNOOKS (53), Dark, tall, and handsome. No one knows much
 more than that. He'll sort it out, just don't ask him how.

This isn't their first rodeo. Or their second. In all honesty
 they've probably lost count.

Standing impatiently on the side lines, are their wives:

-SHELLA (28) Essy's third wife...

-CARLY (53) 'The Lotto'

The dads pause a moment opposite Goggs and Sheldon Snr,
 sizing them up. Then...

MUSIC FADES OUT

They embrace. Shell slaps and antennae shakes are flying out
 a dime a dozen. The wives watch this tomfoolery, sighing,
 like teachers forced to keep an eye on naughty young snails.

Sheldon Snr struts around Essy's shell, freshly bedazzled
 with what looks like gold teardrops.

It's loud and tacky and screams Essy's latest promotion at CommonsShell Bank to anyone within eyeshot.

SHELDON SNR (CONT'D)

What's this Essy, I didn't know there was some new disease going round. It's not contagious is it?

GOGGS

If being a Warthead is contagious you caught it a long time ago Donny boy.

SHELDON SNR

Oh yeah? Well then it's no wonder what snail I got it off.

Essy sighs, half-heartedly attempting to swat away Sheldon Snr and Goggs who continue circling him, slapping his shell like used car salesman's.

ESSY

I keep thinking maybe one day you boys will grow up. If I'm a Warthead for enjoying the finer things then so be it. There's more to life than slimeing around.

SNOOKS

That's hard to comprehend for snails who peaked in high school.

Sheldon Snr and Goggs' wack each other in excitement.

SHELDON SNR

Oiii big talk coming from a snail who still slides around like he's Mr Mysterious.

GOGGS

(imitating a sultry female voice)

Oh that Snooks, so dark and delicious, what ever is he hiding under that gloomy shell.

SHELDON SNR

Not a brain that's for sure.

Sheldon Snr and Goggs crack it. Essy can't help but join in. Even Snooks cracks a sly grin.

Speedy, observing intently until now, slides forward, much too excited.

SPEEDY
 (exaggerated laughing)
 Hah. That's because he lost his
 brain! That's the big mystery! Ha
 ha. Ha. Where'd Snooks brain go!

ALL THE SNAILS
 Shut up Speedy.

Speedy ducks back as though about to retreat into his shell.
 This feels like a standard occurrence.

SPEEDY
 Sorry boys.

CARLY
 You're not being harsh to my
 precious Speedy now are you.

The boys are spellbound by Carly's dazzling shell. Speedy
 McGee really is one *lucky bastard*.

ESSY
 Of course not lovely Mrs McGee, we
 would never.

Sheldon Snr nudges Goggs.

SHELDON SNR
 Suck up.

Goggs makes a slurping gesture with his body that any idiot
 with one working eye could tell was vulgar.

Shaz slaps the both of them on the back of their heads.

SHAZZA
 We're in Church for Sloggers sake.
 Behave yourselves. You're worse
 than your sons.

This mention of Sheldon seems to finally spark a thought in
 Sheldon Snr's brain. He looks around him, then to where
 Shelly-Anne chats idly to Shella and Carly.

SHELDON SNR
 Shelly-Anne, where the bloody
 shell's our son?

Sheldon shelters behind the shadow of Sir Stanley
 'Steadfast', his naked form quivering. *What was I thinking?*

He tries to steel himself.

SHELDON
 Okay, okay. This is fine. You're
 fine.
 (deep breath)
 You're only completely shell less
 and everyone is looking at you.
 It's not that bad.
 (deep breath)

Sheldon dares a peek.

THERES SO MANY of them. *Where did mum and dad go?*

He takes another breath before sliding to the next statue.

'SLOWPOKE' SHERRYL: "Slow and steady wins the race". Another
 deep breath.

DOUG 'THE THUG': "Just call me Doug". *See? this isn't so bad.*

WORDSWORTH 'THE WISE': "Strongest minds are often those whom
 the noisy world hears least".

He takes another peak at the path ahead. Only three more
 statues to go then he's made it to the Great Nave. He's
 nearly in the clear.

PODDRICK (O.S.)
 Practicing your evasive moves
 Sheldon?

SHELDON
 AH.

Busted.

Sheldon whips his head around to find he has an audience.
 Poddrick, Molly, Rockwhile and Shelliot linger around him,
 like they've been watching his performance for a while.

SHELLIOT
 Are you okay Sheldon? You look
 lost?

SHELDON
 Lost? Pfft. I'm fine. Just checking
 out all of Slogger's stars before I
 head in.

Sheldon smiles coyly, emerging from Wordsworths shadow. He
 tries to appear braver than he feels.

His friends all gasp as his *au naturel* form comes into view.

MOLLY

I think you lost your shell mate.

SHELDON

I don't need it. I'm doing the Crossing like this.

SHELLIOT

And-and Perrywinkle is okay with that?

PODDRICK

No wonder you missed this mornings race.

Sheldon takes this chance to steer the conversation away from the slug in the room.

SHELDON

I had more important things to do. How'd it go then, you finally get your win Podster?

PODDRICK

Yeah. You should have seen me. That track was *mine*. You wouldn't have stood a chance Shelly.

SHELDON

Big talk from someone who's always chasing my tail.

PODDRICK

You would have been eating my slime this morning, isn't that right guys?

ROCKWHILE

I calculated Poddrick was 0.89 slurps off his average pace.

Sheldon laughs.

PODDRICK

Doesn't matter. I still won. Next year it'll be my statue up here you're hiding scared behind.

SHELDON

They don't give out statues for second pla-

MOLLY

There's no way either of you bozo's are getting a statue over-

ROCKWHILE	SHELLIOT
Statistically only 0.75	(squeaky)
snails get awarded a statue	I think I'd just like to
each yea-	finish the Crossing ali-

Their squabbles build into an incomprehensible clamour as they talk over each other until...

LILITH (O.S.)
Guys, why are you all hanging
around here still.

The gang quit their arguing. The sudden silence is somewhat eerie. The hallway is empty of snails beside their group. The opening ceremony mere moments away.

LILITH (CONT'D)
Well come on, we better hurry.

They all take off for the doors to the Great Nave. Sheldon drops in next to Lilith.

SHELDON
(whispering)
Are you okay? What did Wordswor-

LILITH
(dismissive)
It's fine. I'm fine. I'll tell you
later.

Sheldon looks at her long. Imploringly.

LILITH (CONT'D)
(harsh whisper)
Later.

Sheldon drops it. For now.

As they approach the Great Nave they find all their parents waiting impatiently.

GOGGS
There they are. The Don was bout to
round up a search party for you
lot.

SHELDON SNR
Two quickest boys of their year and
they can't be bloody on time.

SNOOKS
Sounds like two other snails we
know.

The dads start clapping each other on the shell affectionately.

SHAZZA
(stern)
Oi.

Like naughty school snails they freeze.

SHAZZA (CONT'D)
Quit it you lot. It's time.

Sheldon looks up in awe at the doors of the Great Nave that tower before him.

It really is time.

28

INT. THE GREAT NAVE - STAGE - MORNING

28

Wordsworth looks out at the rows of the congregation that have been crammed into the room: first-timers and veterans of the Crossing... They sit and stand in front of him.

Perrywinkle stands to his side. His gaze flits across the congregation, approving of this years turnout.

WORDSWORTH
(reading)
...a tradition that has stood
longer than any of us, longer than
the stones beneath our feet, longer
than the oldest of you can recall.

He turns the page.

WORDSWORTH (CONT'D)
(reading)
A tradition is not merely an act
repeated-

Sheldon Snr and Co attempt to shuffle in quietly, so as not to cause a disruption to the ceremony. They find an empty row of seats in the back.

SHELDON SNR
(loud whisper)
Crap, she's already started.

GOGGS
(loud whisper)
Why'd no-one tell us.

Shelly-Anne nudges Sheldon Snr. Shaz shushes Goggs.

Wordsworth doesn't falter in his speech, maybe he didn't hear them come in.

Perrywinkle is visibly annoyed by the disturbance.

WORDSWORTH

-it is the bond between generations, between those who came before and those who now stand at the threshold. You will doubt yourself. You will wonder if you are strong enough. If you are worthy. And yet, each step forward is proof that you are. For it is not the Crossing that grants you passage. It is your own will.

Sheldon absorbs these words. As if Wordsworth speaks solely to him.

WORDSWORTH (CONT'D)

There is no shame in fear. There is no shame in hesitation. The only shame is in never stepping forward at all. And so, as those before us have done, as those after us will do. Let us Cross-

Wordsworth for the first time looks up from his papers and adjusts his glasses, pleased with himself.

WORDSWORTH (CONT'D)

-into another generation.

He closes his book and shuffles off pleased.

WORDSWORTH (CONT'D)

Thank you, Shellhaven.

A hushed rumble of approval from the crowd.

ON THE MICROPHONE- As Perrywinkle steps in front of it. For a moment he stares out over the room of young inspired snails.

A grin emerges. He lets the silence linger, his smile widening just enough to unsettle and suggest he enjoys this uneasy moment- relishes in it. Finally...

PERRYWINKLE

(jokingly uplifting)

Well...it's good that our elders can still inspire, isn't it?

A chuckle ripples through the crowd.

PERRYWINKLE (CONT'D)
Wordsworth speaks of tradition...
And he is right- But traditions...
traditions are only as strong as
the ones who uphold them.

A pause. Just enough time for doubt to creep in.

Perrywinkle struts away from the microphone. He doesn't need it, nor notes. His presence alone is enough.

PERRYWINKLE (CONT'D)
The Crossing is not a right... It
is not a gift... It is a test- one
decreed by Sloggers himself.

A flick of his antennae. He nods, just slightly- like he's letting them in on a secret.

He continues pacing across the stage. Every antennae in the crowd follows his movements- captivated, as though by a spell.

PERRYWINKLE (CONT'D)
A test not all of you will pass...
because despite what Wordsworth has
just told you. Being brave. My dear
snails. Is not enough.
(beat)
Sloggers must deem you worthy.

A murmur rolls through the crowd. The faintest reaction of fear.

Perrywinkle does not flinch. But, he pauses. His gaze drifts deliberately...settling on Sheldon. Then...

A MOTHER SNAIL in the crowd, begins to SILENTLY CRY. A small sound, but it grows-- like the rustle of leaves before a storm.

Perrywinkle begins again, his voice rising in power in an attempt to drown it out.

PERRYWINKLE (CONT'D)
And understand this...not all of
you are worthy. Our strength and
unwavering faith in Sloggers is
what keeps Shellhaven prosperous.
It is vital that Sloggers have a
voice for which to speak to the
strong Escargolytes of Shellhaven.
You have all chosen me to bear this
humble burden.

To the side, Wordsworth shuffles slightly.

PERRYWINKLE (CONT'D)

And of course the venerable
Wordsworth.

Wordsworth gives a small bow. Perrywinkle stretches his arms out wide. As though to ensnare all the snails seated before him within his grasp.

PERRYWINKLE (CONT'D)

And bear it we shall. No matter the
cost. No matter the struggles. No
matter the sacrifices that must be
made. The snails left behind. To
ensure that Shellhaven endures.

The CRYING is louder now. The mother snail has abandoned all composure, lost in a private world of memory and grief.

Snails nearby attempt to console her but freeze under Perrywinkles glare.

PERRYWINKLE (CONT'D)

No my dear snails, bravery is not
enough. Only the strong will
endure. Only the strong are worthy.
Sloggers will decide all your fates
on the strength of your shells. And
when that Will is known-

MOTHER SNAIL

(distraught, through
tears)

NOOOOOOOOOO! DON'T TAKE MY BOY!-

MILO (15), small for his age attempts to hold his flailing mother together.

MOTHER SNAIL (CONT'D)

MY SON! NOT ANOTHER ONE!-

Perrywinkle nods at two GUARD SNAILS stationed near the doors to the Great Nave.

They forcibly escort her from her chair. She makes one last wild grasp for Milo.

MOTHER SNAIL (CONT'D)

MILO, please, no. I can't, I can't
do it, I can't, I can't.

She continues her tortured wails as she is dragged along the pew.

CLANG. The great doors slam shut. Silence envelopes the Nave once more.

Perrywinkle surveys the host as though daring for another interruption.

Not an antennae twitches out of place.

Sheldon and Poddrick turn to each other, with eyebrows raised. They both begin to mouth a cuss- *F**kkkkk*.

HARD CUT TO:

29

EXT. OUTSIDE 'THE GREAT SHELL' - LATER

29

A trumpet snail blares out a LONG LOUD HORN before the brass band kicks into gear, belting out a lively send-off tune.

The grounds are packed with proud parents saying final goodbyes:

Speedy McGee & Carly stand with 10 other young snails, each gorgeous in their own right, crowding around Shelliot. They attempt a hug, but it's almost impossible as his younger BROTHERS AND SISTERS clamour around him pulling on his shell this way and that.

YOUNGER BROTHER 1

You'll bring me back a present,
won't you Shelliot?

YOUNGER BROTHER 2

I want a bigger one than him.

YOUNGER SISTER 1

I want the biggest one of all!

YOUNGER SISTER 2

Can you tell Sloggers Catie stole
my Sherryl doll?

YOUNGER SISTER 3

Did not!!!

YOUNGER SISTER 2

Did too!!!

Nearby, Gote and Garley belly-slam an OLD SURFER SNAIL (could be their triplet if not for his weathered, sun bleached shell).

OLD SURFER SNAIL
Go catch some gnarely raindrops
with Sloggers my dudes.

GOTE
Gnarlyyyy Daddd!

GARLEY
Gnarlyyyy Daddd!

Essy lectures Rockwhile on something of the utmost
importance.

ESSY
...image is everything out there,
you hear me? We've a name AND a
company to represent. It's not just
yourself you're proving is worthy
to Sloggers..

Rockwhile scribbles math equations in the dirt, half-
listening.

ROCKWHILE
(to himself)
I think i've finally solved it.

Essy erases his scribbles.

ESSY
(exasperated)
Your not bloody listen' to me.

On the outskirts, Snooks and Molly stand side by side.
Surveying the teary-eyed displays before them as though such
emotions are beneath them.

SNOOKS
You ready?

MOLLY
Born ready, dad.

SNOOKS
Good stuff Mol. Good stuff.

Elsewhere, Goggs & Shazza smother Poddrick in kisses.

GOGGS
(between kisses)
...so Sloggin' proud of
you...

SHAZZA
(between kisses)
...my wonderful boy...

PODDRICK
(angsty but smiling)
Mum... Dad... quit it...

Milo, looking even smaller than before, timidly approaches Perrywinkle, who looms near the doors, stoic.

MILO
(barely audible)
Um... Sorry... excuse me.

It's unclear whether Perrywinkle merely doesn't hear or simply doesn't care.

Milo musters courage:

MILO (CONT'D)
(louder, squeaky)
Sir Perrywinkle!

Perrywinkle turns his head slowly, staring through Milo.

MILO (CONT'D)
Um...I-I was wondering Sir where my
mother was taken off too.
(beat, gulping)
I haven't said goodbye yet.

PERRYWINKLE
You had quite the *public* goodbye
already. I would be careful.
Sloggers does not take kindly to
greedy snails.

Milo backs off, trips, and ends up spinning in his shell helplessly.

In the middle of the crowd, Sheldon & Lilith stand with his parents. Sheldon Snr & Shelly-Anne hold him close, as if willing their strength into him.

SHELDON SNR
I know we said this mornin' you
weren't ready for the Crossing but
that was just us being stubborn old
snails.

SHELLY-ANNE
We've only ever wanted to protect
you lovey.

SHELDON
I know mum. I know dad.

SHELDON SNR
 (tearing up, trying not to
 show it)
 You were just so small when we
 found yer. So small, an' helpless
 without a shell-

SHELLY-ANNE
 Oh love, its alright...

Shelly-Anne places a hand comfortingly on Sheldon Snr's
 shell. He brushes her off.

SHELDON SNR
 It's alright. I'm alright.
 (composes himself)
 We're just so proud of you son.
 You've come so far. You don't ever
 need to prove your worthy to us.

SHELLY-ANNE
 We love you just as you are
 Sheldon. We always have.

Sheldon, uncomfortable, wriggles from their long hug.

SHELDON
 I know guys. I love you both too.

Lilith stands close by, a hint of sadness in her eyes.

SHELDON SNR
 And of course, our lovely miss
 Lilith.

SHELLY-ANNE
 Come here lovey.

They envelope Lilith with equal warmth.

SHELDON SNR
 (whispering so Sheldon
 can't hear)
 You'll take care of our boy out
 there, now won't you. He needs
 someone with their shell screwed on
 properly by his side.

Lilith smiles against his shell.

LILITH
 Of course I will...Don.

Sheldon Snr pulls back, beaming at this, his last worries wiped away. Shelly-Anne disengages too, squeezing Lilith's hand.

SHELLY-ANNE

We'll keep an eye on your mother
for you.

LILITH

Thankyou, Shelly-Anne.

BOOM!!! A cannon fires overhead.

Wordsworth and Perrywinkle stand on a small stage. Wordsworth taps the mic a few times before...

...SCHREEEEEEEEEEEECH.

The shrill sound pierces through the crowd. Snails throughout the crowd clutch their ears. Nearby, Perrywinkle flinches and shoots Wordsworth a sideways glare.

WORDSWORTH

(clearing his throat)

Eh hem. Excuse me my young
Escargolytes.

(unfurling a scroll)

The Crossing calls. Slogger's
noweth waits. Whilst water still
falls. Undecided, be thy fates.

He nods to the brass band. They launch into a spirited tune. A bright tune. A marching tune.

The young Escargolytes peel away from their parents, sliding into formation with practiced ease. Lilith goes first, Sheldon hesitates, glancing back at his parents beaming with pride. He musters a smile, then joins the others. The time has come.

A hush falls as they settle into neat rows behind Wordsworth and Perrywinkle.

SCHLURP, SCHLURP, schlurp, schlurp

SCHLURP, SCHLURP, schlurp, schlurp

They move as one—one people, one faith, one Ruler—marching away while parents cheer and wave, confetti-like petals fluttering to the ground.

At the front, Poddrick & Sheldon jostle for position, trying to outdo the other. Lilith rolls her eyes in amusement.

The young Escargolytes march in perfect formation, the rest of Shellhaven waving until they vanish into the horizon, the lively tune fading with them.

SCHLURP, SCHLURP, schlurp, schlurp

SCHLURP, SCHLURP, schlurp, schlurp

SCHLURP, SCHLURP, schlurp, schlurp