

Raft of Worms

by Amy Halloran

I wasn't happy with my companions, but they were the only creatures left in the world. Eventually we became great friends and learned to talk across species, speaking in a kind of singing I'd never heard before change thrust us together under the lusty sun. Though we had no paddles, two of the worms were great inventors and had equipment that turned brine into potable water. Lucky for us, the liquid was also caloric and quite nutritive. Every time I drank the thin beverage I marveled at how it worked like beet juice and bone broth, carrying me forward with strength.

I learned to love what we had: the long, bright days, the water all around us, and even their slithery bodies, which somehow never dried under the pounding sun. The worms and I have become the same size. I can't tell if they got bigger or I got smaller. My skin never changed to theirs, however. The concoction protects me from both sunburn and dehydration.

Gradually, my clothes have worn thin and vanished. My shame has also disappeared, and I am glad for the increased connection with my shipmates. Touch is another form of words. Don't get all grossed out: it's not sexual. However, it is satisfying.

I found that my preconceptions about the worms, and all the words I might have attached to them, were ridiculous. I used to think of worms as shirkers, blind creatures that tunneled away from confrontation, but they were the ones that saved me. I'd heard forever that everything was going to end, but did nothing to help.

The worms, on the other hand, heeded the warnings. They readied the supplies necessary for our strange survival, enlisting the help of beavers and nimble fingered raccoons to build a good-sized sturdy raft. Said structure shows no sign of wear and tear despite its exposure to salt and sun. If my calculations are correct, we have been here more than a year.

The worms took the vicissitudes of this future climate head on, preparing for the desalinization process, and selecting me. I am

perhaps their least smart choice. Flaggering of spirit and irregular in imaginative powers, what I bring to the raft I don't know.

Still, with song, they assure me that I am the one they meant to grab. Our discussions are odd, sung and also physical, and through the nudgings of our snuggles I am beginning to believe, by sheer force of repetition, that I have something to give to this remnant of our world.

If I could speak what they tell me, it would sound something like this:

“You are essential and helpful. Under this blessing sun, you are learning things we all need to know. Someday we will find land, and you have the capacity to repopulate it. Not with a reproduction you'll recognize, but that's okay. We'll help with that.”

