There's a Worm in my Stew

a short story

by

Judith K. Berg

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"Waiter! Waiter!" I cried out. "There's a worm in my stew!"

"Oh, it won't eat much," laughed the waiter.

"That's not the point," I insisted. "Please take it back."

"Back where?" asked the waiter in a smug tone of voice.

"Back to the kitchen," I returned.

"Oh, they won't want it," he cackled as he walked away.

Well, I could see that I was going absolutely nowhere with this conversation. Just then the worm popped his head out of my stew. "Hey, by all rights you should be dead. You should have been cooked," I spoke to Mr. Worm. Its response was a wiggly type of dance.

"Ah, perhaps someone from the kitchen stuck you into my rather cool dish before I was served. I bet it was that indignant waiter," I continued. Mr. Worm then disappeared within the depth of darkness. Perhaps it burrowed into the assumed-tender meat or retreated into a slimy vegetable. Maybe it was even slithering through the concentric layers of an onion. Actually, my stew was a perfect worm habitat!

Although I was really hungry, there was no way that I would eat this habitat – I mean stew. I figured the dinner roll that came with it should be OK. But, before eating the roll, I decided to be cautious, so I broke it up into small pieces. After I carefully examined each piece, I thoroughly chewed it before swallowing.

My waiter had disappeared, so I sat quietly hoping that my check would soon be advanced to my table. Mr. Worm again popped out of my stew.

"Hey, dude, where did you come from?" I spoke in a giddy fashion. There was no response to my question. Since I was sitting alone at the table, I continued the conversation. "Ah, maybe you are an ancient philosopher who has entered my world in this limbless snakelike form. Please speak to me, oh great one," I said bowing my head in a reverent gesture.

Upon again raising my head, I looked at the table next to mine. The two people sitting there looked at me with a confused, almost frightened expression. I smiled and proceeded to tell them that I was just conversing with the worm in my stew. This time their expression was one of pity as they rose and left their table.

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What happened to my waiter? Maybe I should get up to leave, because then he would appear for sure. As I glanced around the room, I had the distinct feeling that people were talking about me. They all seemed to be staring in my direction! Maybe the word had gotten around about the lady who spoke to worms. I was also sure if that were the case, the story would have grown into an exaggerated form – one that was totally out of proportion – that I would not want to know. Where is my waiter?

Mr. Worm appeared and disappeared throughout the enduring duration of time. Although not really the case, I felt that the minutes had turned into hours.

I eventually decided that it was best not to converse out loud with my wiggly companion. After all, who in their right mind would carry on a conversation with a worm in their stew. I did, however, feel a bizarre connection to this creature whose ancestors had been a part of the prehistoric world. Then the urge became too great, so when Mr. Worm again appeared, I spoke softly to it.

"I bet that I could learn a lot from you. Just think of all that your ancient ancestors had seen as they slithered through the unknown world of darkness," I whispered to my little friend. "Mysteries would have abounded in their journey through life."

Finally, my waiter appeared at the table with my check. "Oh, you didn't like your stew? I am so sorry," he spoke with a real lack of concern as he began to remove my dish.

"Wait!" I insisted. "I want to remove my friend from the stew." I then proceeded to stick my hand into the dish, swirling it around and around to the strange glare from the waiter. There was no worm! Then I took my small spoon and dished the stew first into a glass, and then into a sugar bowl from which I had removed the paper-wrapped sweetness. There was no worm! Ultimately, when I was satisfied that the worm was no longer in the real world, I grabbed my check and walked from the table. Now I was sure that other patrons in the restaurant were staring and talking about the Worm Lady.

When I reached the cashier, a smirk appeared on his face. I paid my check. Then the cashier broke out into a loud hearty laugh. I walked quickly to the door in a very embarrassed state. He followed me. Upon reaching me, he apologized for his outburst then proceeded to explain his behavior.

"When I saw that worm appearing atop your fancy hairdo, I just couldn't restrain myself," he cackled.

"Oh, I understand," I said as I walked away.

When I got outside of the restaurant, I, too, broke out into laughter. My companion had probably wiggled into my hair when my head was bent down during my search for him.

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"Ok, Mr. Worm just make yourself comfortable. We have a long road ahead," I expressed, as we bounced along the street.

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