

Helping the Starfish

by Lola Georg

I know you've heard the story
about a person walking on the beach
who noticed all the starfish washed upon the shore

this person started picking up starfish
tossing them back into the ocean

after awhile, a stranger comes along
“what are you doing?” the stranger asks

“helping the starfish” was the reply

the stranger looked about and saw thousands
upon thousands of starfish
stranded on the beach

“you can't possibly save them all
your efforts are fruitless”, the stranger replied
“what difference can you possibly make?”

“I've made a difference to that one”
the beach walker noted
tossing yet another starfish back into the ocean

now this is where the story often ends
with a moral of helping where one can
against the backdrop of futility

(as if the act of ‘helping where one can’
is enough)

but suppose, just imagine
the story continues

the stranger considers our beach walker's words
and follows suit, doubling their efforts

after awhile, the stranger becomes a friend
helping the starfish

imagine then, that someone else comes along
with similar questions, and upon hearing similar replies
decides to join in
helping the starfish

and so it goes, people wander by,
word spreads, the curious arrive
(along with the naysayers)
all drawn by the message to
help the starfish

and before long
there are no more starfish to toss
there are none stranded on the beach

imagine what happens next

an older person gives their starfish
to a younger person saying
“Here, you help the starfish”

or,
perhaps

someone who has picked up too many starfish
says to those with none
“here, take some, let us together
help the starfish”

and thus, after awhile,
helping the starfish becomes
we the people
help the starfish

and, imagine once more that
we the people learn the patterns
of starfish strandings
of oceans, of tides
of the moon
and we the people
start to prepare for a day
when the starfish may get stranded

and *then* imagine, with much joy
(because we breathe in joy)
songs and dances,
music and poetry
praises and gratitudes
blessings and celebration for

we the people
help the starfish

and, in so doing,
the starfish help we the people