

Ramshorn by Sandra Young

What a strange creature you are, with your hair blowing across your face! Your nose is weird and your eyes disturb me; they follow my every move. Why do you live up there where it can be so dry with that desiccating wind? Come and join me in my world.

It's lovely here in the water. I can travel in all directions and sink right down to the depths of the pond if I choose to. But I prefer to float just below the surface with the sun beating on my black spiral shell. My shell, my home. I am always at home wherever I am, are you?

I stretch out my salmon pink foot and I see the shock on your face. Why do you assume that I should be slug grey like those land molluscs? I am beautiful, like a modern-day ammonite. We have been around so much longer than you. You would say that we haven't evolved much. I think the opposite, we live in harmony with our environment. I can't say the same for you.

I pull myself along the waterweed with my foot. Don't worry, I won't eat the weed, think of me as your aquatic cleaner. If it's on its way out, I'll eat it. Dead or dying plants, fine by me. Uneaten fish food? Why not? But the best by far has to be algae. That is just divine, so green, so lush, so very moreish. I think that I was weaned on the stuff. From the see-through baby snail that hatched from an egg, I grew to this spirally form in just a few weeks. And look at me now! I'm as big as your finger nail!

I see you starting to count how many snails there are. I know, just like you, there are rather a lot of us. Rumour has it, that in the beginning, there were only nine in this pond. Now we are hundreds! And before you ask, yes, we are hermaphrodite. I'm a her and a him, definitely not an it, we resent that.

I try to lay my eggs in places the fish won't find. Too much of a tasty threat for them, and I have seen a young friend or two get swallowed whole. I still have nightmares.

Also, I know that though I love the sun, I'm a sitting target for the crow. But hey ho, sometimes you have to live near the edge. Does it matter? I doubt that I'll see two summers but time is relative. Here, in my world life is easy, no hurry. Whilst you! You'll be off in a moment, always rushing, always flustering, always worrying. Why? Come on now, chill, float about and remember - life is short make sure you take time to count us ramshorns!