

Chapter Five: The Vegan Witch's Toad

By Sherrie Theriault

PUZZLEMENT

"Oh, Shrigley my Dear Watson, I promise it isn't as bad as all that," I try to assure her. "I am a toad. Toads are notoriously self-centered. Following in my footsteps is not a good idea. It's just that I am what I am, but you are an anomaly; possibly the rarest of all creatures, a kind witch." Shrigley blushes and I feel like I have dodged the bullet of her threatened tears.

"I feel like there is no hope sometimes, like everyone that I admire is going in a different direction from my family teaching. I feel like we are alone in the world, my family and I," she inhales deeply and with a little shudder.

"Are they away?" I nod to the empty house.

"Who?" she asks.

"Your family. I know I didn't make it through the entire house, but I haven't seen anybody else to home; unless you count the bathroom beastly I ate," I wink at her.

"Oh, oh, they're kind of spread out," she says in a breathy, taken aback sort of way.

"Okay, no worries. I don't mean to tread on your toes or anything. I am an overly curious kind of toad that's all, nothing more nothing less, the whereabouts of your family is your business. I'm a toad of the world. I know not every family lives together under a Dodge."

Shaking her head, a smile starts to peek through her startled gloom. "I'm just having an odd kind of week, that's all. Well...more like an odd month, but that's not your problem. Was that fly enough or are you still hungry? Although I don't see how you could be hungry after eating that centipede."

"I don't know either; it's the wonder of me!" I say, holding out one hand for emphasis.

"You have nice finger prints by the way," Shrigley says.

"I'll take it; any compliment is a good compliment no matter how strange," I quip. "Are

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you hungry? I've eaten everything in your house pretty much and you haven't had a thing. Can I catch anything for you?"

"No! I mean, no thank you...I mean, vegans don't eat bugs," she flusters.

"I could catch you a slug. They're not bugs. They're barely anything...and they're soft, no chewing needed," I counter.

"Eeww! Thank you, no! Actually I think quite a bit about slugs. I think they are very bright and sweet, too."

"Obviously you have never eaten a slug, they are tangy if anything and you can't eat the bright ones— they're poisonous!"

"You are morbid," Shrigley says, shaking her head. "I mean they are sweet-natured and bright, you know...like intelligent."

"Oh, that I wouldn't know, as a rule I try not to talk to my food, it's a practice which can only lead to disaster. But you suit yourself. If you want to have great discussions with slugs or centipedes far be it from me to stop you." I say, sounding more huffy than I feel.

"Some think I'm crazy for talking with toads," she says and smiles gets up and walks to the cupboard pulls out a box and grabs out some stuff that looks like dirt clods and begins popping them into her mouth.

"Now that looks revolting," I say before I can stop myself. "I'm sorry, none of my business, sorry." I finish and hold my lips together with my toes.

"It's not good, but not all of us can eat delicious centipede for breakfast," she grins at me.

"This is true, he was one in a million, but I'm sure I could scare you up something else, but," I look at her grin, the glint in her eyes. "You're teasing me; aren't you?"

"Oh, I couldn't help myself," she says.

"So what are your plans for the day? Are there things you need to accomplish or are you planning to make sport of me all day?" I ask.

"Please don't pout; it was just a little joke. You're a tough toad, you can take it."

"I'll have you know that we toads are sensitive, our prides get hurt easily and we are slow to forgive. Now I am willing to overlook this teasing, but only because I try to be a bigger person than my small- minded counterparts and also because I am aware that, as kind as you are, you only meant it as a mood lightener and a distraction from that fact that you eat dirt and I thought only birds did that," I tell her.

"And worms," Shrigley says.

"You eat worms? I ask. "I thought they were living 'hings!"

"No, worms eat dirt. I don't eat worms," she answers.

"They don't have brains, so why not?" I ask.

"How can you say they don't have brains? They have brains. Don't they?" she questions.

"You have obviously never tried to talk to a worm, no brains at all, they don't know from up." I emphatically explain.

"Oh, you!" she says with a smile. "And to answer your question, yes. I have a thousand things to do today. If you're not too busy would you care to join me?"

"Do you really want me to come? Won't your sensibilities be traumatized when I go wild kingdom from time to time?" I quiz.

"I think I can stand it and I would appreciate the company if you're not too busy that is."

"I think I can take time from my life of endless occupation to accompany you. I mean, it's the least I can do since you were good enough to make me into toad meringue and heal my pain."

"Good! Then it's settled. I'll go get my hat and we'll be off," she says, and drops the spool of her hair back on the shelf and heads down the hall. I step into what's left of the puddle in my dish garden and lower my belly into it. It does feel good to be full, especially after a valiant battle to fill it.

I wake from sleeping to see not the Shrigley I know but a vision. Dressed in layers of saffron, current and sage she stands, and I am mesmerized by the transformation. My eyes light on the pendant she is wearing; rich with diamonds. The sparkling star twinkles as she sways

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slightly, standing there watching me.

“I didn’t want to disturb you, but Jeff it’s time for us to go if you’re going with me, and time for me to go if I’m going alone,” Shrigley says to me in a soft even tone—as if I were a baby or a mental patient.

“I’m coming, I am,” I say to her with as much conscious enthusiasm as I can muster given my sleep grog and digestive distractedness. “Hey where is that gumdrop bag?”

“I can’t present you covered in sugar, I’m sorry, Jeff, I just can’t. Do you mind riding on my shoulder?” She asks me with earnestness. I look up to her shoulder and see a miniature dog bed affixed to her robe like some kind of pet care epaulet.

“Is that thing safe?” I ask in rising panic. “Where are we going anyway?”

“Ah, well there is that.”

“There is what?” I ask.

To be continued...

Sherrie Theriault bio: I do not believe that I became an autodidact because I was raised by wolves, but surely it was a contributing factor. The years I spent in the waters of the Outer Banks, afforded me a mainline infusion of chaos and tranquility. The simultaneous discovery of my ability to write and the secret meaning of my desire brings fire to pages I hadn’t expected to burn down. I write villain free fiction for children. I embrace contradiction and try to illuminate the dark without losing the shadows. I work daily to give voice to diversity, for isn’t that the gift beyond measure? Please visit my site to the books I’ve written and the artwork I produce: www.SerendipitousGallery.com. Here is the link to the books Amazon page: http://www.amazon.com/Vegan-Witches-Toad-Sherrie-Theriault/dp/1496190890/ref=sr_1_8?ie=UTF8&qid=1423835627&sr=8-8&keywords=Sherrie+Theriault