

Chapter Two: The Vegan Witch's Toad

By Sherrie Theriault

Chapter Four: SURRENDER

"No, no!" I scream way up. "I'm not happy, not happy at all," and I sing a little more. She lifts me and brings me so close to her face I could almost kiss her, but instead I talk. "You're a freak, you know." Never a good idea when I talk. I am a cranky surly cuss of a toad. I think there's a reason witches make us into other things. We are insufferable as we are.

"I know," she says and smiles and laughs a little laugh like she doesn't mind that I am cranky and mean. Like she's glad I'm back. All I can do is mumble under my breath, "freak, freak." Shrigley can't hear me over the clomp of her boots on the floor.

"So, you want some bugs?" she asks, and I nod, feeling sorry for calling her a freak. "I'm going to have to go look for some. I can't give you the ones in the house."

"Have they gone bad?" I ask with concern. There is little worse than a bug gone bad.

"Oh, no, it's just that since they're in the house I kind of think of them as my bugs. It would be too tragic for me if you ate them. It would be like having a cat come in the house and eat you," she says with a gasp as if the loss of me would be a blow to her soul; a flyspeck melodramatic, but nice.

"I would hate to be eaten by a cat. Yes, I see your point," I tell her. Of course I don't see her point at all. I mean...yes, it would be tragic for me to be eaten by a cat, but for me to eat a nice room-temperature bug, now that would be cause for celebration. No tragedy at all! There was no sense in telling this to Shrigley. She seems to have no grasp of toad esthetics. No need to try and teach them to her now.

"I'll tell you what," says Shrigley, "I'm going to go get dressed and you show yourself around, and then we will go out to find you some strange bugs. Well...bugs that are strange to you...well no, these bugs are strange to you, too. We will go out and find bugs which are

strange to me. Is that all right then?”

“Oh, yes, you get dressed. I’ll amuse myself,” I tell her. She clomps down the hall at such a clip that I can see the corners of her robe flapping behind her. I apprise myself of the kitchen layout and move down the hall Shrigley flapped down. The first room off the hall is the bathroom, with a big tin tub with a curtain all around and a sink and a pot for her business. I am here really just minding my business when a wave of moving legs catches my eye. There it is! The hugest wheaten centipede I’ve ever seen—like something from those wild game programs put on by the Mutual of Insurance. I can’t even think. My tongue acts on its own, flies half way across the room and nabs the big boy in its middle. I suck my tongue back into my mouth and this mammoth will not fit and now he’s screaming and writhing. Shrigley pops her head in. I guess she’s heard the screaming, but I’m wrong. She’s chattering away at me like nothing is wrong. I had no idea that witches can’t hear bugspeak, but it sure explains why Shrigley is willing to protect the bugs who live in her house. She has no idea the unspeakable things they say! She looks down now and sees the waving ends of the centipede thrashing and moving me around the floor and she shrieks. I am trying to hold two thoughts in my head:

A. How did my Aunt Cedric tell me she ate the wild centipede of Borneo?

B. How am I going to explain to Shrigley that I am eating her pet centipede which she surely must saddle and ride around in the yard weekly?

“Don’t let him hurt you!” Shrigley screams at me.

I am stunned by this; I can’t be hearing her right.

“Jeff, don’t let him hurt you!” she screams again.

I am hearing her right and this gives me courage. She doesn’t want me to spit him out. A good thing, too because I can’t. I hop decisively, and use the bounce power to wrench the beast further into my body. It’s dawning on me that this thing is more than twice my length and maybe more than twice my strength; plus which he is screaming and I hate when they scream.

The swears pouring from his mouth would embarrass me to have Shrigley hear, but thankfully she can’t hear him over her jumping around and of course there is the fact that she

can't hear him anyway. I jump forward and smack my face and the centipede's head and tail into the sink base. This stuns him momentarily and that is all I need to choke him down the rest of the way. Well there is one stray leg hanging out of my mouth, but this is a triumph in spite of everything. I eat the giant and Shrigley is smiling. I don't understand why, but she is and I will take it. My mother always said that an ignorant toad is a blissful toad. I don't know that I am full of bliss, but I am full of centipede and I am ignorant as to why it is fine with Shrigley that I ate her mount.

"You are the best," she rambles, "The very best, do you know that? I bet you don't, but Jeff you are my hero. You've saved me from that horrible thing, that monster!"

I want to mention that this is a living bloody thing that I ate and it was theoretically her great bloody beast that I ate, but I can't talk yet because he is not yet dead in my stomach and he is so great in size that I am sure if I open my mouth he will disengage from me and no one wants that...so I let her prattle on.

"I hate him so much, the last time I saw him I screamed and jumped up on the edge of the sink, but I don't have anyone to chase these things with toilet paper and not catch them the way my dad does for my mom and I have no second bathroom to retreat to like my mom does either, so when he scurried up into the ceiling I climbed off the sink, dried my tears and tried to accept the fact that I would have to live with him, but now I don't and it's all thanks to you Jeff, and I could just kiss you!"

She picks me up and I brace myself for the kiss and suddenly she stops. I open my eyes and I see she is holding me back a bit away from her lips. "Hmm, I want to kiss you," she says, but there's a leg there," she points to my lip. "And it's twitching."

I swallow as deeply as I can and I feel the centipede settle to his death and the last leg slip from in between my lips, but the moment has passed and Shrigley walks me out and puts me gently into my dish garden.

"You're full now, right?" Shrigley asks me. I let out a burp that sounds like the firing of a jet engine and leaves the taste of jet fuel in my mouth. 'Every good deed has its price,' my

Grandma Cedric once told me and she was right.

“Excuse me. Yes, I’m full, overfull if you want to know the truth, but that was a job I couldn’t leave half done,” I tell her.

“No and I am so relieved that you did it so completely. He has been the bane of my existence scaring me and taunting me for months. I think if you left any little bit of him I would fear his return,” she says with a shudder. “Is there anything special you want to do right now?”

I want to crawl under a ledge and have a nap/coma, but I don’t think she will go for that and it’s so hard to find a ledge when you’re looking for one.

“Digest, but I don’t need any help with it. If you have other things to do, please don’t mind me,” I wave her off.

“Oh, okay. You don’t mind hanging around the hut today? ‘Cause that would be great for me, I get so behind in the everyday maintenance type stuff,” Shrigley says as she plops down in the chair, grabs a hair brush from a jar of assorted brushes on the shelf, unwraps her hair and begins detangling her long mane.

I watch her with rapt attention until it turns into a trance and I fall asleep. I don’t remember hearing the buzzing of the fly all I do remember is flicking my tongue and instantly having delicious room temperature house fly in my mouth. I swallow and my eyes fly open as I realize I may have eaten an insect that Shrigley does care about and didn’t want eaten by me, but engrossed in some strange activity my house warm house fly desert seems to have escaped her eye.

I see her with a loose ball of tangled hair in her hand and she draws it out and pressing the thinnest end to her thigh and rolling it with the palm of her hand. She pulls the rest of the hair ball gently with her other hand and rolls again the first end on her thigh. I can see that the whole mess has now turned into a twisted thread as she holds both ends then she does some maneuver with her fingers and puts the two ends together and pulls the middle so the thing twists against itself and is a two ply cord. She sets this five inch piece on the table, grabs a needle from a star shaped pillow with pins stuck in draws from her brush the last remaining

shed hair threads it through the needle eye. Now she plucks a large spool from the shelf behind her and unrolls some of the hair cord on the spool; holds the new section of cord to the end and whip stitches it to add it on. As I look more closely at the hair cord spooled on there I can see little trinkets poking out here and there from the layers of wrapped hair cord on that spool.

“You can eat the house flies,” says Shrigley, not looking up from her work. “I’ve asked them over and over again if they can’t stay off my food to please remain outside, but they won’t do either. They keep treating my lunch like road-kill and, as much as I love them, I do recognize you need to eat.” Shrigley finishes stitching and pulls her needle free and plunges it back into her pincushion.

I think to mention that houseflies outside of the house cease to exist, but I might be wrong about that so I change the subject. “Gathering supplies for a hair-shirt?”

A laugh bursts from Shrigley, but I have no idea why. “No, no, this is my witches ladder. I’ve been working on it since I was four, well, six, but it started when I was four. I took over the job of it when I was six and it’s all my hair since I was four,” she tells me in a rush of words I cannot parse. She unspools the thing and all I see really is a load of twisted hair and little keepsakes tied here and there. I do notice that the more she unwinds the lighter the hair gets. When she is all the way at the beginning the hair is blonde as can be and I get a little shiver of pleasure thinking of her changing from some blonde little tadpole into this almost full grown brunette.

“So, what do you think?” Shrigley asks as she respools her ladder.

“Must have been a beautiful tadpole,” I tell her. She stops what she’s doing to look at me. I feel the air grow cold between us. “Good outcomes come from good beginnings,” I finish my thought and I see her muscles relax and she returns to her spool.

“I was a busy girl, my mother always said,” Shrigley tosses at me without looking up.

“My mother would have loved you. Her main complaint about me was that I never did anything, never chased things around, but I realized that the swarm of my siblings drove it all in my direction, so if I sat strategically still I could reap all the rewards,” I tell her.

Writing Raw

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“Did that work?” she asks.

“Just look at me; I am as big as a house,” I beam with pride.

“You weren’t even as big as that centipede,” she laughs.

Really?” I ask. “And who ate whom?”

“Point taken, but you’re no house.”

“Tell that to the housefly flapping around in here,” I say coughing up one wing.

“That’s never good,” Shrigley says with disgust.

“Not good for him, but no problem for me, it tickled,” I say, clearing my throat.

“What a perspective you have, Jeff. It’s like you are the gravitational center of the center of the whole world,” says Shrigley, wrinkling up her nose, but smiling in spite of herself.

“Is that such a bad thing?” I ask.

“I guess not, it’s just that this is the perspective I have been trying so hard not to have, and I’m confused, that’s all,” she says with a shrug, like this isn’t the biggest thing in the world—shrugging like she is not about to cry.

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