

Chapter Nine: The Vegan Witch's Toad

By Sherrie Theriault

QUEEN'S LUNCHEON

Shrigley lifts my bowl and I, and we, all go back into the cave and the glorious presence of the Queen.

"Hungry?" asks the Queen.

"Always!" I chirp from my bowl.

"How about you, young lady?" asks the Queen.

"I could eat," says Shrigley.

"Good," says the Queen. Leading us to the table where there are pretty platters with sliced fruits and dishes with cooked things that look like yum. Shrigley puts her hand in my bowl and offers me her palm to climb out on and puts me on the table.

"Tell me what looks good to you and I will put it on your plate," Shrigley says to me.

"What have you two come up with?" asks the Queen.

"All of it looks good," I mumble, "but what is it?"

"Fruit, vegetables, grains, legumes, stuff like that; nothing with blood I'm afraid. Will you pass out from lack of gore?" taunts Shrigley.

"Oh, my lands, Shrigley, if he's hungry after dinner he can go hunting for himself. I don't think you have to coddle him," says the Queen.

"Oh, she wasn't coddling me. She was taunting me," I tattle.

"Very good then, a toad needs a taunting every now and then. It keeps them cranky and annoyed just as they should be," the Queen returns.

"Be that as it may, I don't think Jeff should be sent to hunt in the jungle at night," says Shrigley, protecting me while still trying to maintain a casual air.

"Nonsense, I believe I overheard him telling you that he is a wild animal. I'm sure he will

be quite at home with the jaguars and the monkeys,” explains the Queen.

“I’m not worried about the jaguars and monkeys. I’m worried about the snakes and spiders,” Shrigley counters.

“I like spiders,” I say. “Extra legs for snacking.”

“With our spiders you would be the snack, darling toad,” says the Queen and shrugs. “I guess he will have to make do with this.”

Shrigley serves me a healthy sample of everything and I am too full to move in less than a minute.

“So, now that I’m sure Jeff here won’t blow away from starvation, tell me your ideas.”

“I had two thoughts. One, is to go back to my swamp and plant cypress trees—either bald or pond cypress, I’m not sure which. The second idea is to continually go through mirrors planting sweet chestnuts everywhere they will grow,” says Shrigley, startling me with this, not having realized that she had drawn any real direction from our conversation. The Queen is nodding her head to herself and slowly eating things from her plate. All the same pretty food I had inhaled she is daintily consuming.

“Though these are admirable ideas, I have a few things to mention to you. On the subject of planting cypress in the swamp, one of the great challenges with this is the nutria population. Cypress saplings are essentially a feast for the nutria and you, being a vegan and pacifist, this puts you in a very awkward position. You won’t kill them, and relocation to their original habitat is beyond your means. As far as the random planting of the chestnut trees, I believe you have confused yourself with a Roman legionary who had empirical permission and power to go from country to country providing a hundred years or better sustenance for entire villages.”

“Though, Sweet Heart, my actual problem with these ideas is that you seem to have missed the meaning of the word quest—confusing it with the word mission. I don’t want you to become a missionary. In fact the concept of quest is to prevent just that. You don’t need to save the world. You need to discover who you are, what you have passion for, and how you can

contribute to a sustainable world. Trying to be everything to everyone? That's a job for myths and crazies. You, darling, are neither one of these."

I know the Queen said "myth" and not "moth," but she got my urges going. There had to be something to eat around this cave other than all this goody, goody veggie stuff, but now that I'm thinking about it, that old moth I ate earlier was pretty bad. Maybe I should stick with the vegetable plate.

"I think you should limit your quest to a week— ten days the longest, Shrigley. I don't want you making a lifetime commitment to anything yet. I want you to sample life, not strap yourself down to any one thing just yet," finishes the Queen with an approving nod to me.

"I can't think of a hurdle to jump or a challenge to conquer," says Shrigley, shaking her head, "and I've been really thinking about it."

"Again, I think you have confused directives. This is a quest not a conquest. There is a dramatic difference, I assure you," explains the Queen.

"Oh, Grandmother, I don't know what to do."

"Yes, I see that, Shrigley, I see that," soothes the Queen.

"Jeff suggested we simply start anywhere. He retracted it immediately, but I think it's what makes the most sense of all the things we thought of," says Shrigley.

"I think that could be marvelous," nods the Queen.

I just stare in disbelief. Anything could happen to us and we are being encouraged by an adult to go for it! I am beginning to think turned into potion might not be my worst option!

"I think you two should get some sleep," the Queen continues. "You can head out at first light, and I'll see you two back here for dinner in a week. How does that sound?"

"Good," says Shrigley, "I'm relieved to have a plan. I love you, Grandmother. Is there any particular mirror you would suggest?"

"Close your eyes and spin around once or twice. You can be your own randomly generated number."

That was all she said and now we are headed who knows where for some sleep, before

Writing Raw

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a cliff dive into eternity. Even nice witches are dangerous is the lesson I'm learning—nice as can be, but reckless the whole lot.

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