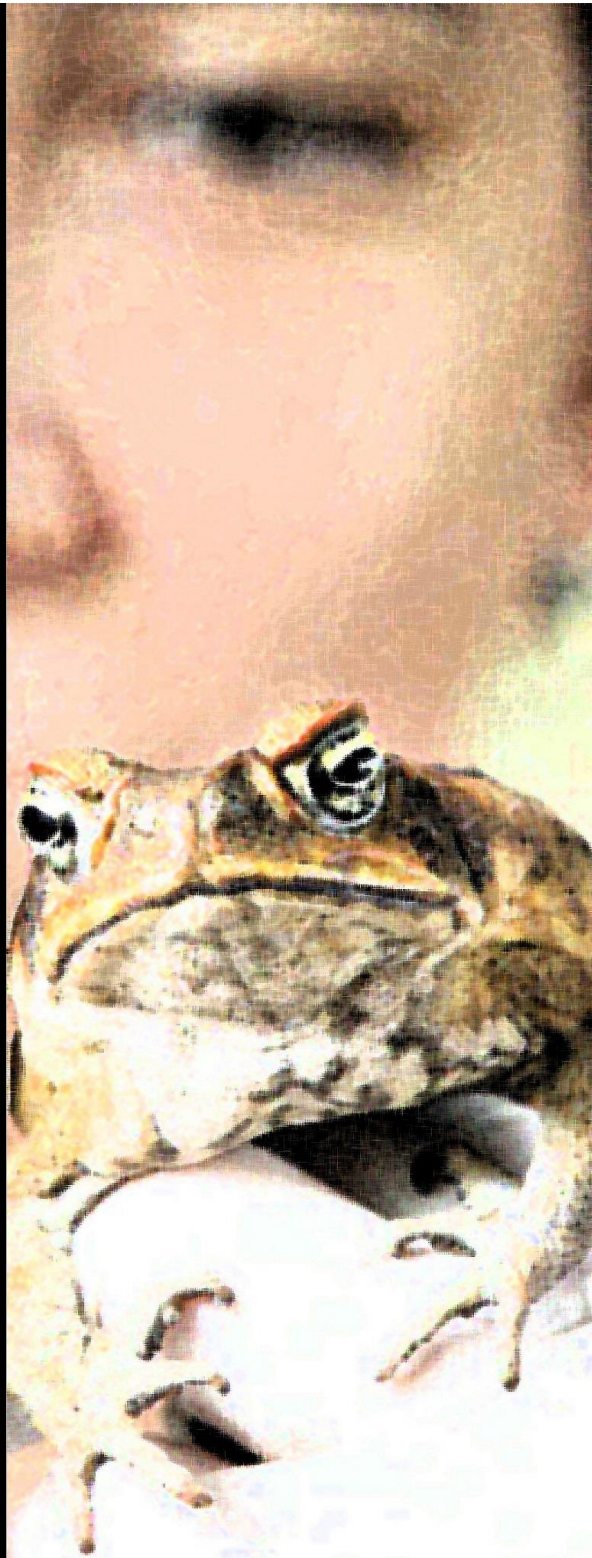


The Vegan Witch's Toad

By
Sherrie
Therriault



Chapter One: The Vegan Witch's Toad

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“Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.”

Sir Winston Churchill

I.

THIS WITCH HAS OTHER PLANS

Dark blood seeded with grains of puss filled the boils, but this was not the worst part of my encounter with the old gargoyle who took me to the far side of this moldering swamp. It's just the lingering after effect. I want to hide the marks that show me as a fool who didn't heed the warnings of the witch—the witch I took for a worry and a nag.

I'm not entirely to blame mind you; witches are forever regaling terrible tales to young toads like me, trying to scare us into remaining near to home, convenient to be added to a brew or a potion. How was I to know this witch had other plans? That she herself was a traveler and had suffered the very fate she attempted to ward me off?

She's not as dreadful to look at as some of the other witches I've known. Not that I've known tons of witches. I've known only a few. Finding her here in her mukluks, leaning against the giant cypress, was a bit of a surprise. I can't say I'm glad to see her. I'm humiliated to be

covered in the very boils she warned me about, but it's a comfort to see someone I know at a time that I feared I might be lost forever.

"Hello Cedric," she said. The fact that she knew my name was not as astonishing as you might think. You see all toads are named after their fathers. Thus all toads are named Cedric. Come to think of it maybe we are all named after our mothers, for they are also all named Cedric!

I personally like to be called Roderick, though no one ever calls me that. I'm, mostly known as Jeff.

"Hello Witch," I reply.

"Are you done with that adventure—or are you planning to go back for more?" she asks.

"I've had quite enough I think. Thank you for asking. Very kind, very kind." I answer.

"Well, good! I was thinking...if you don't have any plans... are not otherwise engaged...maybe you would possibly..."

"My lands! Could we get on with this?" I interrupt her.

"Do you want to run away from home?" the witch blurts out.

"What do you think I was doing in the swamp? Strolling of a Sunday afternoon and just got lost?" I ask her.

"I wasn't sure, I don't know the travel habits of toads. This could have been a pilgrimage for all I know," she finishes.

“I suppose that’s true, but just to inform you: I am an orphan. My whole family used up by persons such as yourself,”

“That’s terrible,” says the young witch in horror. “Just the worst!”

“It’s what happens I suppose. No use going on about it. Live in an enchanted forest, turn into an enchantment,” I explain—sounding much more pragmatic about the whole thing than I feel. My mother was charmed by the whole idea. She thought that it was all natural somehow. She said if I looked at the example of acorns turning into oak trees I could then see how it makes sense.

When I told her I didn’t understand what one thing had to do with the other, she reiterated, “Can’t you see? The acorns disappear, and in their place appears a tree. *We* disappear, and in our place there is magic. Acorns turn into trees and toads turn into magic. It is *so* simple Jeff. Even *you* can see that, can’t you?”

Of course I couldn’t, and thought my mother quite daft. But then she became part of a love potion and left the forest in bottle carried by a secretary who had plans to spike the coffee of her boss.

I have often thought, after that, that my mother was right. She *did* become magic, but it was still no comfort to me. So I had decided to get out of Dodge and that is what I did. Dodge was a big metal car that was left to rust and fall to bits in the woods and my family had been breeding in the puddle underneath it for many generations. It had been a safe spot until a bunch of witches moved in next door. I don’t know what it is about a witch that toads can’t

resist, but everyone in my family fell for one of their lines—and now were turned into magic every one.

I wasn't going to follow them to that fate. I resisted and rejected every offer every witch ever made to me and this is how I had gotten covered in these boils, but I think I mentioned that already.

"Is there a "to," to which you are running?" I ask the young mud-crusting witchling. "Or is this simply a fleeing?"

"You take me for a reactionary? That's only fair, most witches are, but I try not to be," she says, rubbing the toe of one boot with the other. "I have a plan. Not a good plan, mind you but a plan."

"Do I get to hear this plan?" I ask her, sounding more petulant than I expected, I always expect some petulance. It's my age. I mean, I'm an adolescent toad and we tend to be moody. Not that adult toads are all that cheery, but they mellow over time. At least I think they do. All the toads I know have been transformed, as I'd mentioned, so in truth I don't rightly remember what happens to toads as they mature. All I do know is I'm tired of being so cranky and contrary. Times it gets so as I don't even want to be around *me!*

"Did you hear me?" she asks.

"What?" I say, "No, I didn't hear you. What did you say?"

"I said, I'm not telling you," she says, and folds her arms and nods her head.

"So I didn't in fact miss anything," is my retort.

Writing Raw

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“When you put it that way, no,” she says.

“So glad I asked then,” I tell her and look around for some clue as to where I should be hopping off to, since there was no way I was going to be traveling with *her*.

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 see the books I've written and the artwork I produce: www.SerendipitousGallery.com