

## Chapter Seven: The Vegan Witch's Toad

By Sherrie Theriault

### ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK NOW

I am getting an uneasy feeling, a feeling like I might have been better off with a witch who wanted me to be a substitute for henbane. Whatever these two were on about it sounded a lot more involved. I tend to be a short-attention-span toad and thus totally unsuitable for any long term plans. I don't want to say the wrong thing and reveal all of this at once. There is still a small chance that I can do what they brought me here for and then I would have the admiration of both of these magnificent creatures and I could die happy.

I might be short on attention but I am not short on brains and I still know that any time toads get mixed up with witches the toad ends up dead—it's like being a barely know character in a Star Trek episode. You may not know how, but before the show is over you know you will be dead. I might be over-thinking this, but I doubt it.

"Introspective little guy isn't he," says the Queen.

"Yes," says Shrigley, "Also quite wary of me—well of all witches actually."

"With reason, I'm sure, not reason to be wary of you, but blood witches are persons to be wary of for certain," replies the Queen.

"Blood witches, what are blood witches?" I ask.

"Non-vegan witches; you know witches like the ones who lived near your family Dodge," answers Shrigley.

"Those witches are the reason there is no family under that Dodge anymore," I say.

"They are a strong bunch."

"Dangerous," corrects the Queen. "They are dangerous but weak. Weak witches use blood spells to compensate for their lack of strength."

"They don't seem weak to me," I say.

“No of course not; the weak always feel the need to show their teeth either in a growl or a grin,” she answers.

“I’m still not clear on this whole vegan thing, let alone the implications of vegan witchcraft, but they did grin and they did growl and one by one they consumed my family tree, not to mention the family hiding under the Dodge,” I say as I turn my head, keeping my good eye on a fat beetle that flies right in front of Stanley and is heading my way.

“Witches are inventors and collaborators not destructive villains, Jeff, but the witches who were warred on by the blood-lusters were changed. A war waged with blood-magic pushed the cooperators to either the abandonment of life or the abandonment of cooperation and the taking up of blood. The result was blood taken and lives lost—forced to separate themselves from other species and forced to choose between life and death for themselves and life and death for bats and toads it little mattered, because their way of life was lost and their love of life was lost. There is no simple answer, no spell to quell the negative control of the blood letters, forced on them by the blood-lusters,” the queen tells me, but I have no idea what she is talking about. I have spent much of my life trying to avoid witches and have succeeded in avoiding their politics as well...like that beetle just avoided my super-sticky tongue.

“Grandmother, you’re speaking of the war waged on the witches by other religions.”

“Shrigley darling, they can call it whatever they want. It’s all witchcraft, and they are all witches. We are all witches. There is no difference other than denial. Power? Lack of power? We all have it and use it for good and evil and blame someone else when we are ashamed or jealous.”

“You don’t mean me, do you, Grandmother?” I ask.

She shakes her head, “No, you’re a toad, toads are different and you are magic, but you are not witches, not people.”

“Oh, good, that’s a relief,” I sigh and get sharp looks from both of them. “It’s too complicated to be you, any of you,” I finish and they both nod. I see a very old moth haphazardly flapping, dust falling from its wings,

“Dearly decrepit,” I say and snap it from the air. I get another sharp look from both Shrigley and the Queen.

“What did you say?” asks Shrigley.

“Who did you say it to?” asks the Queen.

I almost choke, never having tasted mildewed moth before. “I said ‘dearly decrepit,’ and I was speaking to my snack,” I explain to both. “That moth was definitely a last year’s leftover. I had hoped that the reduced amount of wing dust would have improved the snack-ability, but alas that moth tasted like hamper bottom instead.”

“So, this is what we call constructive sarcasm, is it?” quips the Queen.

“I like to think of it as wit; my guess is that you disagree,” I retort.

“I think it’s bad enough that you eat living things; must you first disparage them?” mumbles Shrigley.

“Shrigley my dear...” Shrigley raises her eyebrow and I leave off the Watson, “what you don’t seem to want to accept is that food is a battlefield. Being nice to those about to be eaten only makes things harder.”

“Harder for whom?” Shrigley asks.

“Harder for all concerned,” I say with a nod of my head— a move I use to make the point and hold back bile.

“Enough said on that subject,” says the Queen. “Shall we move on to the reason for your visit?”

“Yes, of course we should,” I answer. “What is the reason for our visit?” I ask Shrigley, trying to act like I’m cool—not the idiot toad who came through a looking glass without an Alice and without a clue. I catch the Queen give a little wink to Shrigley.

“Yes, he will do nicely,” says the Queen.

“I thought so, but I wanted to check, in case it was simply toad infatuation,” says Shrigley who is bouncing a bit on the balls of her feet, something I can feel since I’m riding on her shoulder.

“ell, a bit of that is not a bad thing, Darling, but yes, I think he will make a good match for you. So now you are ready to embark?” queries the Queen.

“That’s the other reason I’m here. I’ve thought about it constantly but I haven’t come up with a place to start. Are you sure you don’t know what I should do? Are you sure you aren’t just waiting to see if I can find it for myself?” Shrigley asks.

“Oh, I know you think I am like that, but really I’m not. Darling, if I knew what you should do or where you should go I would never waste your time by keeping the information from you. The problem with quests is that they are so intensely personal. You say you have been thinking a lot. What have you come up with so far?” asks the Queen.

“A long list of things not to do and places not to go and a huge oppressive weight on my chest telling me that I am not up to saving the world,” Shrigley sighs with despair.

I cross my eyes and strain my ears trying for the life of me to figure out what in the world they are talking about. I was willing to let all the lofty blood-witches-are-weak-witches stuff pass by me without a thought. It doesn’t concern me! The Queen said I’m not a witch, and I am more than willing to let it all pass me by. The where-Shrigley-is-going-and-what-Shrigley-is-doing conversation I am willing to let go of too—until I realize the first reason we are there is to verify that I’m the one.

I might be lazy, but, as I’ve said before, I am not stupid. I have been validated by the Queen Grandmother here. I am as good as stamped and approved to be the one something. I still don’t know what it means, but in my aching stomach I know it means I am central to this don’t-know-where, don’t-know-what quest, and being part of a blind ambitions tour with Shrigley sans groupies and roadies is not my idea of a good time!

People laugh off being sent on wild goose chases because they liken it to a treasure hunt gone awry. In fact a wild goose chase is an endless wing-flapping, head-whipping, webfoot-slapping train wreck of goose pooh. I feel a deep need to take control. But, remembering that I am on the wrong side of a mirror riding on the shoulder of an adolescent witch, I choose to simmer down and keep my mouth closed.

# Writing Raw

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“You’ve come a long ways. Last time you were here you were sure you would never find a familiar and now you have this glorious Jeff. I’m sure you will find your way to the rest of your purpose with just as much aplomb. I have every confidence in you, Darling,” says the Queen as she leans over, engulfing me in her silk strands of hair and hugging Shrigley. I shrug out of my safety shirt so I can feel the cool brilliance of her hair all down my back.

“Was it this hard for you?” asks Shrigley as they straighten up.

“Oh, yes, every bit. There are days I’m still not totally sure I got it right, but most days I feel my bones hum with the rightness. I know you will find that too.”

“Yes, I’m sure you’re right. I try not to fret.”

“But it’s not easy, I know,” answers the queen.

As touched as I am by this real life drama, I notice something is different. I look in the air and no Stanley. Then I spot him over there in a tray. He is eating from a bowl of fruit. “I knew it!” I yell. “I knew it!”

“What?” they both turn to me. “What did you know?” asks the Queen.

“He was already that way,” says Shrigley under her breath to me.

“Sure he was,” I squawk, not heeding her warning.

“He was. When have I ever lied to you?” she asks in a louder, hushed voice.

The Queen looks at me with a confused glance and tracks my eyes to stare at Stanley. “He’s always been white,” she says.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but he’s not a fruit bat,” I say, toning down my irate to mere agitation.

“If you mean was he ever a flying-fox type fruit bat, no. He was never that. If you are asking if he has always been a fruit eater, yes, always,” she answers me. “He does on rare occasion eat a bug, but it’s not his preference.” With this Stanley lifts his head from his feast and screeches something.

“Hear that?” asks Shrigley. “I told you he had always been like this.”

I don’t in fact speak bat-screech, but I am embarrassed enough not to feel the need to

point this out, so I don't. Plus the longer I watch him eat, the better the fruit looks—not gum-drop good, but refreshing, to say the least.

“Here,” says the Queen, breaking off a piece from a deep orange stick of a dried something and holding it out to me. I flick my tongue, getting more than just the piece of whatever she offers me, but also her palm. At first thought I expect her hand to be drawn to me and smack me in the face. I have drastically underestimated the situation, and find my body pulled like I'm attached to a bungee cord and I land upside down in her palm, legs flailing. a neck I don't have arching, trying to flip myself over so I can remove my soft underbelly from view. I do nevertheless manage to eat what she has offered me and I am thankful for that, because it turns out to be candy.

Shrigley places her index finger within my grasp. I take hold and she assists my turn and takes me into her possession. I look to the Queen. “May I have more candy?” I ask.

“Dried papaya,” says Shrigley under her breath.

“Tastes like candy to me,” I undertone back.

“Yes, I know, that's why I gave it to you,” adds the Queen out of the corner of her mouth, breaking off a second piece. I manage my tongue better and enjoy the sweet.

“Shrigley, darling, why don't you take some time and sit in the breeze—enjoy the air—stop thinking for a little while. I'm sure something will come to you. Possibly it simply needs an opening,” says the Queen.

“Yes, Grandmother, I'm sure you're right,” answers Shrigley. “You know where you can find us.” She's taking us away to god only knows where, and I know only one thing. She has not thought to bring the candy with her.

The mouth of the cave is pretty and almost makes up for the loss of treats.

Shrigley seats herself at a lovely table on a railed rock outcropping overlooking a body of blue water. Having never seen blue water, I am a bit shocked and it takes me a second to regain the thought-train that has been chugging through my mind, but I focus and blurt, “You know Stanley might be like that, but I am not.”

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"I know," says Shrigley still staring out at the water.

"And just because I eat the candy fruit doesn't mean that I can live on that," I pursue.

"Know that, too," sighs Shrigley.

"I'm not a kit you can build to your specs," I blab.

"Yep," she says.

"I am a wild animal; a fierce carnivore, an eater of meat, a killer of prey. I am your worst nightmare!" I roar.

"I know what you are, Jeff," says the young witch with little affect and not even a glance in my direction.

"Then why are you trying to change me?" I screech.

"What?" she asks. This has gotten her attention and now she looks at me best she can. For my part I make the daring leap from her shoulder to the tabletop at least a foot away and turn to face her, defiance wafting from me like steam. "How have I tried to change you?"

"You disapprove of me," I tell her.

"I don't," she gasps.

I rethink. "My life style, you disapprove of my life style; you want me to eat fruit," I say.

"You want me to feed me slugs. Does that mean you disapprove of me?" Shrigley asks me.

"Well, no, but those dirt clods can't be good for you," I say.

"And hunting centipedes twice your size can't be safe, but that doesn't mean I don't respect your need to do it. I know who you are Jeff, I would never dream of trying to make you into anyone else," soothes Shrigley.

"Okay. I'm glad we have that settled," I say. "So, why didn't you bring the candy?"

"Are all toads this unsatisfied or is it just you?" she retorts.

"Just me," I say, and wink at her. She stares out at the water and strokes my back with a cool fingertip that's almost as good as candy.

"So where are we going?" I ask as her petting of me slows.

"I wish I knew," she sighs. "I wish I knew."

"When is the deadline for your decision?" I pry.

"There isn't one; with the exception of the one in my head," Shrigley sighs again, resting her fingertips lightly on my back.

"Then why are you trying to make a decision? Why not leave life open ended?" I push.

"I'm one of those girls who likes to know the outcome before she starts," she says and tilts her head. "I know life isn't like that. My grandmother has told me a thousand times that its not, but I still want a guarantee."

"Hooked on those happy ending?" I ask.

"Nope, I prefer a happy ending, but I accept sad ones, tragic ones, perverse endings, too. I simply want to know before I embark."

"Yes, but if it were to be a bad ending you wouldn't go," I counter.

"That's not true! I read sad books even when I know the ending is sad," Shrigley asserts.

"Yes, but that is very different than traveling down a disastrous road when you have a choice to not travel down it."

"I suppose you're right. Well, maybe you're right, but I still want to know. Plus there is not a thing wrong with wanting to avert tragedy," Shrigley declares, lifting her head and giving a little nod.

"All right, so change of topic. Could you explain why an obviously intelligent young witch would choose to be a vegan rather than the omnivore she and her whole race were born to be?"

"Could you explain to me why a member of a notoriously self-involved species is overwhelmingly interested in the every working of my mundane little life? I really want to know because I was counting on you to be a toad and I need to know if you are not the toad I thought you were," she says.

It is amazing that my if not perverse at least profound self-interest is a thing that not only draws her to me but also is a thing she relies on. There must be something wrong with this



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girl—something seriously wrong 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 the books I've written and the artwork I produce: [www.SerendipitousGallery.com](http://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](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)