

## Chapter Six: The Vegan Witch's Toad

By Sherrie Theriault

### WHERE OH WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

"Oh, yes, safe, yes it's safe. Shall we go then?" she looks around without seeing much and by that I mean her gaze doesn't fall on me.

When I am not the focus it is time to change something, meaning change the focus, because it needs to be on me. My experience is that unless I am under a microscope I am not me, that's right I was born to be a lab project and I know it.

"Do you want me to jump? 'Cause if you do you are out of luck, remember I'm not."

"...a frog," she finishes the sentence with me. "Yes, yes, I know," she says putting her hand palm up in front of me. I stare at it a bit too long and I can hear her boots start to clomp around under the table.

"You're still in those boots?" I accuse her. "A nice dress like that and you are still in those mukluks?"

"They're Wellingtons you know," she says as a blush rises on her cheek. "You like my dress, really?"

"I do. If I weren't me I would tell you that you look like a princess. Since I am me I don't know what to tell you," I say and climb on to her hand. Shrigley lifts me to her shoulder and I step into my toad bed. "You are a beauty, I hope you know, a real beauty," I whisper close to her ear.

"What?" asks Shrigley.

"Nothing," I say, "nothing at all."

Shrigley steps away from the table and I feel as if I will vomit as I look down from the great height of her shoulder.

"You might want to put on the riding shirt," she says to me.

“Does my nakedness bother you?” I ask.

“No, but falling to your death might bother you, and it will certainly bother me if you fall, so please put on the shirt. It will keep you safe,” says Shrigley.

“You made me a magic shirt? How thoughtful of you,” I tell her.

“Not exactly magic,” she says. “Just put it on would you.”

“Where is it” I ask.

“My guess is you’re sitting on it.”

“Oh, yes, right. Got it,” I say as I find under me a short squat shirt. As I struggle into it I discover that the bottom hem is sewn into the binding seam of the cushioned bed I am sitting in. “Okay, not magic, but clever.” I can see the curve of her smile.

“Thanks,” she says. “I worry you know.”

“Good thing too because I vomit quite easily and would hate to do that so close to your ear,” I tell her.

“Yes and I cry quite easily and your broken little body lying on the ground would keep me in tears for a very long time,” she adds. “Shall we go?”

“Wild blue yonder is it?” I ask.

“Kind of,” she says, “too hard to explain.”

Shrigley walks us down the hall past the bathroom door and through an arch into an alcove with three full length mirrors in it. She steps up to a mirror in a beautifully carved pickled oak frame, and makes a swirling motion with her fingers on the right edge of the mirror at about hip height. Then she tugs the star pendant and the chain lengthens, and Shrigley presses it into the area of glass she swirled with her fingers. I can hear a click. She pulls the glass toward us. It swings open like a door and she steps between the glass and the reflection of the mirror.

I swallow and my eyes close. I can’t believe what has happened or what I see—so I swallow again. My eyes snap shut and, as they open, I can tell this is going to be a very long day. I’m not Toto and I don’t know where we are but I know for sure this is not, not, not Kansas.

I blink again and realize I am frightened and therefore hungry. Shrigley closes the glass

behind us and we fully enter what I can only imagine is a limestone cave turned into a home. I want to be stunned by the beauty, but all I am really doing is scanning the room for flies. Alas, there are no flies, but there is a white bat flitting about and that might explain their absence.

“Stanley, is herself here?” Shrigley says with her head tilted up toward the cave’s ceiling. A high pitched siren blasts from the tiny yellow nose of the tiny white bat.

“Oh, sakes alive, what in the world is that noise?” I shout into Shrigley’s ear, trying to be heard over the bat squeal. Shrigley holds her finger to her lip in a mime attempt to shush me.

“No, don’t go to get her, Stanley. We’ll wait,” she says talking to the air, and just then I see a moth flitting, but I have no hope of eating it; the bat will get it for sure. I turn to look for something else to snack on though. There is nothing. I turn back only to find the moth within striking distance and with one flick of my tongue I have the big powdery meal and try not to inhale while at the same time inhaling him. It is very much like the technique for eating shoo fly pie; if you can take it in without getting a lung full of crumbs you win and I am trying to win at this moth eating. The wings shutter and the glittering dust shakes off everywhere, but I am holding my breath with my mouth wide open. Few appreciate what it takes to do this, no one thinks of it as a skill, but it is. I often wish that I could find a way to separate a moth from its wings and only eat the good parts; since I haven’t figured out a way to do that yet I choke down the whole dusty flapping mess.

I’m confused how I got this moth away from the bat who had the clear advantage of being in the air with it, but I was not going to over think it. I prevailed, I have a full fluttery stomach and the bat is still up there hunting. From the corner of my eye I catch a swath of reflected light flashing around one half of the cave. I turn and see a stunning beauty step out of a mirror; one which was opened like a screen door just as Shrigley and I had done just a moth meal ago. This woman with pure white hair streaming down past her waist, is in a buff-colored wrap the million subtle shades of the rock walls of the cave we are standing in. Her overly smooth face is the color of caramel and shows her age only because it beams with agelessness. The power of her presence causes my jaw to drop and the moth attempts meager escape and I

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reclaim myself and close my mouth; my respiration charging through my nostrils like a bull's.

“Darling, darling girl,” She says as she approaches Shrigley and, by extension, me. Shrigley is all she sees at first. Then she looks at me in surprise, “Sweetie, wherever did you get a fire-breathing toad?”

“What?” Shrigley asks craning her neck to try and see me—I guess to see if I’m lighting her on fire with my breath.

“I’m not breathing fire,” I say.

“No? I thought I saw smoke,” says the amazing vision, the golden crone.

“I was breathing heavily,” I begin to answer.

“This causes you to smoke?” she pursues.

“I was trying to keep down a moth,” I conclude.

“They can be rather dusty,” she says and nods to Shrigley and they embrace; enveloping me in a curtain of fine white hair, the scent of rainforest clinging to the strands. As they separate she again regards me. “This is the one?” she asks of Shrigley.

“Yep, he is. The very one,” Shrigley answers with a smile so broad I can feel it from where I am seated and it makes me feel honored, but I have no idea why.

“Well, Cedric, what do you have to say for yourself?” The glorious crone asks me.

“He likes to be called Roderick, but I call him Jeff,” says Shrigley.

“Very well, then Jeff it is,” says the woman who in my mind can be nothing other than a queen. “He seems an excellent choice, Darling, noble and demure.”

“I wouldn’t rush to judgment,” I murmur to myself, but she catches me.

“And why is that?” she asks.

“Well, well... I...I am not so sure I can live up to it,” I answer.

“Ah, how I do love a modest toad,” sooths the queen.

“He’s star struck, Grandmother. Give him a bit to acclimate to your presence; this is not his usual demeanor,” Shrigley explains.

“Is he truly a scoundrel toad? I’ve known a few of those in my time,” smiles the Queen

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with a winsome look attached.

“Seems you think better of me than I am in each direction,” I say not wanting to meet her eyes but needing to, “I am a sometime punk but mostly what I am is a grumbler, but I’m young yet and hope to grow out of it.”

“This is the one,” she states emphatically to Shrigley. “However did you find him?”

“Oh, I waited at the edge of the swamp and watched to see who the old gargoyle was trying to lure. He’s a bad-news sort, but he has great taste. I saw a few promising frogs, even one really nice salamander. When I saw, Jeff here, I was sold. I knew without a doubt,” Shrigley says with a definitive nod of her head.

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)