

Writing Raw

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The Vegan Witch's Toad

By
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Chapter Three: The Vegan Witch's Toad

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CAPTIVE!

She is still chattering as she opens the bag and looks in at me. I immediately think about jumping to safety, but, as I've mentioned before, I'm not a frog, and for a toad this would be a leap of death. So I start hyperventilating.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

"I'm okay for a toad about to die," I pant.

"You're about to die? Are you sick?" she panic-screeches.

"I'm sick about the fact that you are going to kill me," I yell at her.

"Kill you? I'm not going to kill you! Who do you think I am?" she bellows back at me.

"You're a witch, a little witch I admit, but a witch never the less," I tell her.

"I'm not that kind of witch and hey, I'm not that little," she huffs.

"In my experience a witch is a witch like a cat is a cat—and sometimes the small cats can be the most dangerous because they're cute and throw you off guard," I say.

"Well, I'm not that kind of witch. I'm telling you. You have to believe me," she pleads.

Now I'm furious, so furious that I forget to be scared. I hate when I am treated like I'm stupid. I'm not stupid. "You capture me, and want me to believe that you are who...Glinda the Good Witch? We're not in Kansas anymore that's for sure, but this is not Oz," I yell, shaking with rage.

"Capture you? What are you talking about? I am carrying you to the pond. You said you are not a frog, which I know, so I'm carrying you to the pretty pond and hey, did you say I'm cute?" she rapid-fires this out of her mouth at the speed of sound. Then she puts the bag gently on the ground.

"I don't know who you are, but you sure aren't like any witch I have ever met," I say as I

ease out of the bag, looking out at the prettiest pond I can ever remember seeing.

“I’m Shrigley Watson. I’m a witch, but I’m a vegan witch. Do you know what that means?” she asks.

“It’s not polite to talk down to a toad you know,” I tell her as I scramble through my head, trying to figure out what in the world she is talking about. “It’s nice to meet you, Shrigley. I’m Roderick Toad.”

“Funny, you don’t look like a Roderick, you look like a Jeff,” she says with a smile. “But I thought all toads were named Cedric, at least that’s what my mother told me when I was little.”

“I’ve come to believe that mothers know many things, but no mother knows everything and I believe that might explain the discrepancy,” I tell her and hop closer to the edge.

“That is very wise,” Shrigley says, “you are very wise.”

“Yes, yes, I am,” I say coolly, “That means I have a brain.”

“I know that,” she says. “All toads have brains.”

My father would have told her that she was a fool to believe that I have a brain; if I had a brain then I would have listened to her and would never have even gone into that dreadful moldering swamp—especially not with that rapacious old gargoyle. I would also like to mention that boils ache if you allow yourself to think about them, and now that I am thinking about them and how much of an idiot I was to get them in the first place they are throbbing badly.

“My hut isn’t too far from here,” says Shrigley taking a breath and about to continue.

I cut her off. “That’s nice, and could you tell me the price of eggs?” I ask.

“Actually, no, I’m a vegan, I don’t eat eggs. Are you still hungry?”

“I’m a toad, I’m always hungry, but that’s hardly the point I was making,” I splurt.

“No? Huh, well I didn’t make my point either. I have salve for those boils in my hut. It works really well,” she says, pulling the sleeve up on her arm and showing me her boil-free, putty-pink arm.

It surely is not the grey-green I prefer, but, as witches arms go, I’ve never seen better.

“I could carry you. It’s not like I’m expecting you to hop,” she adds.

“What makes you think I would let you put a potion on me? Haven’t I already explained to you that I am the last of my toad family? All the others—and I do mean all of the others—have been made into magic,” I tell her, so emphatically that my vocal sac blows up and I break into song for a second. This is humiliating. I’m thinking about jumping in the pond, but as nice as that water looks, I’m pretty sure in my condition it would sting, covered like I am with all these inflamed boils.

“Salve! I said salve, not potion! What is it that makes you think I want to turn you into magic? I told you I don’t do that and yet you persist in being paranoid,” she yells back at me, and it was all yell with no music accompaniment.

I’m such a loser, I swear. “I’m paranoid? You’re a witch. I’m a toad. I don’t think it’s crazy for me to be apprehensive about the idea of you chemically enhancing me,” I counter, trying to keep composed. Failing, mind you, but trying. And I’m panting. I know foam is going to follow. I am going to foam at the mouth, I can just feel it. I remember one of the dogs that lived with the witches next door; he foamed from the mouth like mad one evening after dinner. It was really bad, big white strings of drool and bubbles endlessly pouring from his jowls. It took the witches forever to realize he ate the sponge. I guess the dish detergent didn’t bother him, at least not right way. After awhile he threw it up and then rolled in the grass like it was a holiday. Come to think of it, he was a strange hound. I think one too many stray spells hit him, made him goofy, more goofy than an average dog. You know, haphazard—at least compared to those maniacal cats the witches kept. Shrigley is staring at me. I can feel her stare.

“Did someone put a spell on you already?” she asks.

“No. Why?” I return.

“Because you are stubborn as a mule. Thought maybe it was cast on you,” she says with a grin. “Now really, Jeff—you don’t mind if I call you Jeff, do you? You just look like a Jeff to me. Now like I was saying, I’m a vegan witch, I don’t include animals, any animals, in my spell work, and I try never to do harm of any kind. I know you don’t want to believe me, but I doubt

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you are going to be able to stand those boils much longer, and I would like to get you home so I can treat you before you start to cry. I hate to hear a toad cry.”

I am stunned. I am panicked. I am flummoxed. I am bewildered. I hurt. I am about to cry, I can feel it. “What do you want me to do?” I ask with a quavery voice.

“Crawl back in the bag and I will take care of the rest,” she says with a kindness I am unaccustomed to in a witch.

I am trembling all over, and barely stagger back into the bag. She whisks me away. This could be the end of me, but I feel too bad to care. I close my eyes to the pain, figuring if I can't see the pain possibly I won't feel the pain, not as much, I hope...maybe...I don't know. The sway of the bag helps me calm down. The leftover sugar absorbing through my skin isn't bad either. I can't taste it but I know it's good. I know it's sweet and sweet is good...at least that's what I think.

I know I fell asleep because I wake up not in the bag and covered with goo. I blink my eyes, I swallow, my eyes close again. I don't hurt. I look around and I find that I am in a dish, a big dish with a rock and a puddle of water, a plant and some moss. I'm hallucinating. I can tell because this is so much better than my real life. It can't be real. I must make sure I don't get sucked into this fantasy, other wise when I come to and regain my senses I will be inconsolable—and no one wants that I can tell you!

I hear clomping boots on a floor and look around to see Shrigley wrapped in a robe and walking toward me, but I am about level with her waist. This is when I realize I must be levitating. This is why I am so high compared to where I normally am, in relation to her and the world. Next thing I know the lower half of Shrigley disappears and I am now level with her shoulders.

“It's so nice of you to join me in this hallucination,” I tell her in my new space cadet voice.

“Is it now?” she responds. “Hallucinating are you?”

“Yes, I'm in paradise and you are here with me and I'm levitating. Isn't that wow, wow,

wow?” I ask her wondering if I am going to float higher any time soon.

“The salve made me foolish, too,” Shrigley tells me. “It will wear off soon. In the meantime, enjoy.” She pulls out a bottle with a dropper top, uncaps it and droppers a few drops onto a glassine sheet, the color is oddly purplish. “Could I impose upon you to step onto this?” she asks as she places the sheet in front of me. I feel quite obligated and hop into the middle of her purple smear. At least that’s what I think I’ve done when I skid across it and find myself in her palm due to her deft catch. “Oops, I forgot, it made me uncoordinated as well.”

I look all around to get my bearings and realize Shrigley has wet hair and is sitting in a chair pulled up to a table containing a dish garden—the very garden I had been in until my ungrace landed me here in her hand. It wasn’t so bad. She smelled good like a sunny marsh or someplace open least ways, and she was warm and damp. I don’t know why I had always thought of witches as coldblooded like toads, rather than hot-blooded like cats. They surely behave like cats, cunning killers that they are. I think my confusion is the lack of fur or possibly it’s the warts. I’m sure it must be the warts!

“Speaking of warts, where are yours?” I ask.

“We were speaking of warts? Really?” she asks. “When was that?”

“Did I say speaking? I meant thinking of warts. Sorry,” I feigned apology.

“Why were you thinking of warts?” Shrigley pursues.

“Why won’t you answer my questions? Warts, where are your warts? They were there before I succumbed to your magic charms, and now they are gone. Warts don’t just disappear, you know,” I pester.

“I believe you are mistaken, I think you mistook mud spatters for wart outbreaks, or you were hallucinating them,” she says with a smile.

“I couldn’t have. You are taking advantage of a salve-affected toad and I believe that is against the rules of the convention,” I splutter.

“Having a wash-up is against the rules? I was dirty and smelly and I washed you up as well, so now you can’t go to the convention either,” Shrigley exclaims.

"I'm not going to a convention! Whatever are you talking about?" I ask.

"Oh, never you bother. You are out of your mind and that's all there is to that.

Now...moving on. Are you hungry?" she asks.

"Since it is settled that I am not going anywhere then, yes, I am hungry. What are you having?"

"Tofu and rice," she says.

"Good and what am I having?" my retort.

"My guess is something else?" she quizzes.

"Anything else," I implore.

"Not a tofu fan are you?"

"I assure you not,"

"Vast experience?"

"Quite the opposite," I assure her.

"So, a case of close-mind-insert-jellybeans, eh?"

"Now that sounds like a plan I can get behind!" I say, thrilled to have a meeting of the minds.

Shrigley puts me down on the purple splotch of ink.

"Hold still," she says, and goes hunting in the shelves and returns with a piece of paper.

"Let me pick you up and you spread your toes and we'll make a print."

She is overly careful in picking me up. I had forgotten that I am now toad meringue. I spread my toes to the best of my ability and land on the nice white paper.

"Jeff, you're almost invisible," Shrigley tells me.

I'm not impressed, I have been basically invisible my whole life, so I hop back into the dish garden. Shrigley lifts the paper tilts it from side to side studying it, getting the most curious smile on her face. "I have a lot of toes," I say feeling butterflies of days gone by dancing in my stomach.

"Yes, you sure do. Very nice toes, Jeff, very nice toes," she smiles at me. "Now how

about those jellybeans?”

“I never say no to jellybeans,” I cheer. I feel like my entire personality has been wicked away with the pain from my boils. I should care about this but I don’t, this witchling is going to give me sweets and heal my blistered puss-covered skin and all is right with the world and I don’t care to be deep anymore. From now on I am going to be Jeff the Shallow Toad. I could have cards printed, maybe put up a billboard.

“I was afraid they might be too big,” she says as she places a plate of jellybeans cut in half before me. What a kind gesture. What a sweet girl! I throw out my tongue, snag all the jellybean pieces with one go and can barely drag my tongue back into my mouth. I am a sugar fool!

Shrigley is shaking her head. “I guess I needn’t have worried.”

I can’t answer her I can’t speak...can’t swallow... can’t move. My chin drops to the moss in my garden. I have no control. One by one the halves come loose and I choke them down.

“You know I can’t survive on candy? You do know that, right? I need meat! Real meat, like a cricket or a caterpillar or something,” I say as the last jellybean half finds its way to my stomach. “And don’t even think of trying to substitute any or that reformed soy-what-it because I need the blood of living things in my system. I’m not like you, tofu girl; I need actual food not something trying to pass itself off as food.”

“I know you’re a carnivore. I do understand that—but why do you think I should be involved with that aspect of your life? I mean, really Cedric, I mean Jeff, I mean, well you know what I mean. You’ve been catching bugs with no help from me your whole life. Why is this suddenly my problem to solve?” Shrigley says, as she adjusts herself and sits back down in her chair. “I just don’t think this should have anything to do with me, do you?”

“If we are in the woods, I would say no, by the pond again, no, at the edge of the moldering swamp even, I would have to say, no, Shrigley. This is not your problem. But once you took me captive it became your problem. That’s what it says in the convention,” I explain, realizing for the first time she has no understanding of the implications of her actions—or the

magnitude of my needs.

“I told you, I’m not going to a convention and I am not catching bugs for you either,” she says with some kind of smug look I’ve never seen on her face before. “Do you know why that is, Jeff?”

“No, no, I don’t,” I tell her desperately wanting to stamp my foot, but knowing I would only splash my little puddle and annoy Shrigley further.

“Well, I will tell you, Jeff. It’s because you are not my captive, have never been my captive and will never, ever be my captive. I swear with you it’s like a game of victim, victim, who’s got the victim!”

“But I’m in your house!” I scream back at her. Then my sac fills, and I sing a few bars of Down by the Meadow. I am such a loser!

“Yes, and that makes you my guest, not my captive, but I guess, if you’re going to sing for your supper, maybe I should try to find you a fly.” Shrigley says, scanning the surrounding air.

“If I’m not your captive, why did you bring me here?” I ask.

“Boils? Salve? Ring a bell? Honestly, Jeff, you would think that no one had ever been kind to you,” she says with a shrug.

“Kind to me? Loads of toads have been kind to me, Shrigley. Loads of toads. But witches? Well that’s the thing. I have watched witches smile and prance, lulling toads like me into spell bowls and caldrons, but that’s it. Never have I ever seen a witch show unambiguous kindness, so...what I want to know is, what is your agenda?” I put it to her straight.

“I see your point, but I have no answer for you other than what I’ve said. I’m a vegan and my craft is vegan, too. I don’t wish to eat you or boil you into a brew. I respect you as an individual "you." I do not always understand, for you do tend to ramble and jump to conclusions which to me are not there, but I do respect your right to be, and continue to be, just as you are, Jeff—and that's my policy, even if you are the craziest toad I have ever met,” she says, and shrugs again.

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“Then I want to go,” I say, stomping my foot and splashing the table. I think to apologize, but I must stand firm. This is a trick and I know it is a trick and I will expose it as a trick if nothing else. I mean really! She is a witch and what can I do in the face of a witch? I mean really! But I am going to at least make a show of it, so I slam down my other foot and splatter more purple tinted water on Shrigley’s table.

“Very well,” she says, with her head hanging down and the saddest look. Gingerly she takes hold of me and stands up. I can feel all the jellybean halves shift and bulge in my stomach. She walks me to the door opens it and puts me out.

As she does this, it occurs to me that she could have flung me. If someone had been so rude to me after I had fed them and doctored them I would have wanted to make them go splat, but then again, I am a splat-making kind of guy. My mother used to say I could make a mess of a mudpuddle. Truth is I usually did! I feel the door close behind me and I am out, locked out and wow doesn’t it feel good. Actually...no, no, no! It doesn’t feel good and I want back in. I hop to face the door and slap my hand on it. That made such little noise I couldn’t even hear it myself. I hop at the door and fling myself against it. This hurts and makes no real sound. Without thinking I fill my vocal sac and let out the biggest song I can.

The door opens swiftly, “Happy to be free I see,” says Shrigley looking way down at me.

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