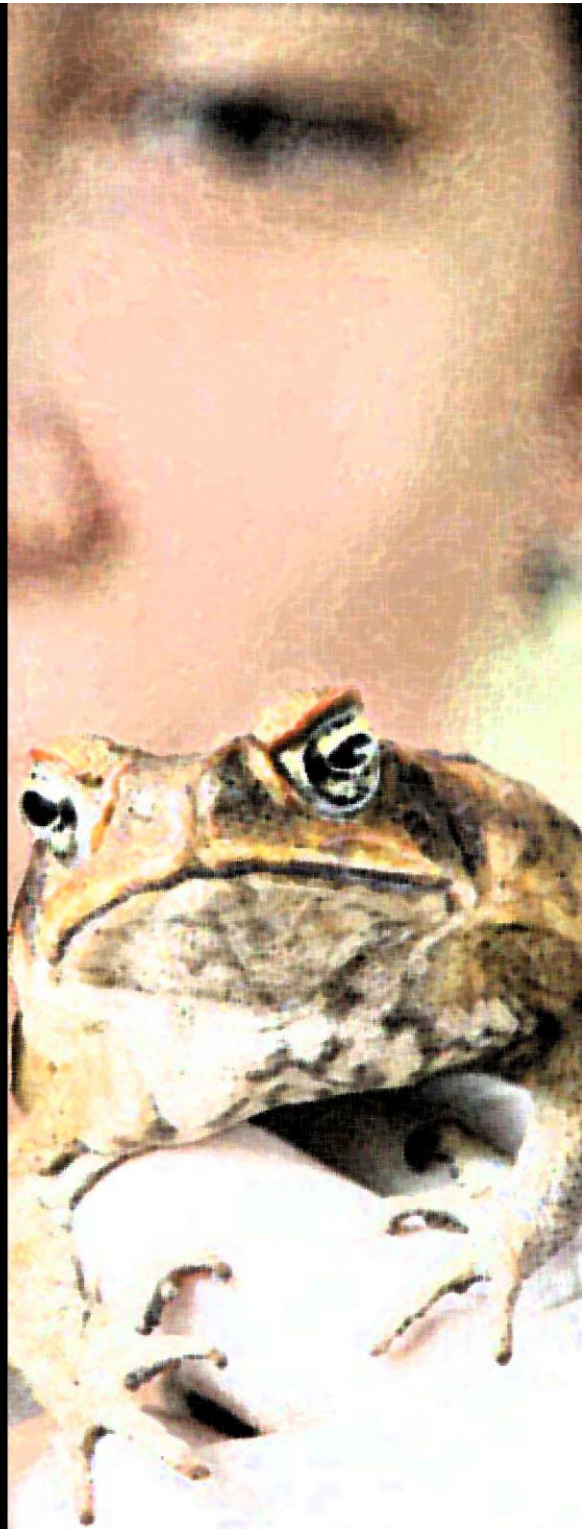


# The Vegan Witch's Toad

By  
Sherrie  
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## Chapter Two: The Vegan Witch's Toad

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### CAN I GO BACK NOW?

That swamp was moldering and if you have ever been in a moldering swamp for any length of time you know that moldering swamps cause boils—something I learned the hard way, but had learned nevertheless. Plus there was an old gargoyle in there who would only be too glad to have me return—or more like never return if you know what I mean. Not that I expect you to know what I mean. I barely know what I mean and I'm me!.

Forward, Left, or Right. These were my choices and I didn't cherish any of them. Looking around assured me of only one thing: there was no bright horizon. So I was left to making one bad choice or another and though I don't relish this it does take the pressure off, doesn't it?

I hop to the left so I don't have to hop directly in front of the witchling, since I am more unsure of her than the other witches I've met. Or is that less sure? Double negatives are wrong I know, but sometimes they make the point in a way that single negatives never do. I have found that hopping away and not looking back is the best policy. I learned this by one day hopping away while periodically looking back and hopping slam into the trunk of a tree. It hurt and I was further reminded that toads don't have necks.

When I got home from that painful lesson and my mother treated my wounds I had to endure a lecture from my mother about how, I unlike the bobble heads in the rear window of the Dodge we lived under, I had a fixed head and couldn't act cool or casual turning my head from side to side. How my mother always knew when I was trying to be cool I will never know. Especially not now that she was being poured into some secretary's boss's coffee!

The giant drums on the sides of my skull had a double vibration going on and this is how I realized that I was being followed. The first set of vibrations were caused by me. I was

hopping and my bounce rang my ear drums. But the second beat? That was her. She was striding with me. I tried to act casual. I ignored her.

“I want you to know I think using living things in spells makes bad magic,” she says.

“Don’t say that!” I yell over the sound of traveling in my ears. “My family have all been turned into magic. Don’t you dare say it was in vain.”

“No! That’s not what I meant at all, only that there is far more magic in a living toad,” she says, waving her arms around as she speaks. .

I went from being a bit sniffy, thinking of my lost family members, to blushing at the compliment she was paying me and if you are thinking a blushing toad might not be very attractive, please keep in mind that I am still covered in bloody pustules so the blush is hardly my worst feature. I’m surprised by what she said, but flattered, too. I have never thought of myself as much use. My father had always said that I was more obstacle than toad—this of course was before our neighbor the witch turned him into a get rich quick scheme for some old guy who wanted to retire to Boca Raton. I don’t think the potion worked quite right because the guy ended up in Hollywood, not the one with movie stars in California, but Hollywood Florida. My mother said at least it was in the same state. My mother often reminded us that magic is imprecise but that it was still magic.

So, this witch thinks I’m a magic toad. Wow is she in for a disappointment! But who am I to tell her that she’s wrong? Plus which, if she thinks I’m worth more alive I have a better chance staying that way until I can lose her in these woods.

I stop at a crag in some rocks and begin pushing at the loose debris with my spade-like back feet and snuggle into the leaf litter.

“You’re stopping?” she asks.

“I’m not a frog you know. I can’t hop endlessly,” I deadpan, giving her my best I-see-right-through-you toad stare.

“I know that!” she says, throwing her hands into the air.

“Fine, so you know.” I try to keep my voice flat and the butterflies I had for breakfast in

my stomach.

“Do you want a gumdrop?” she asks, pulling out a small paper sack.

“Hmm, no thanks,” I say, putting one claw over my mouth. I’ve had to train myself to say no to anything a witch offers me to eat.

“It’s not poisoned,” she says.

“It’s not that,” I start to say. She knows I’m not a frog. She must also know that since I am a toad I will eat pretty much anything. I think all witches know that about toads. In fact, it’s all I can do not to fling my tongue into the opening of her bag and glue it to the first gumdrop I can reach, actually all the gumdrops I can reach, but no, I must not! I must resist. Because though she knows I’m a toad and that I am therefore a voracious eater, maybe what she doesn’t yet know is that when toads swallow they close their eyes. I have a theory that this is part of how witches snatch toads and incorporate us into their magic. I believe they feed us, we close our eyes and in that second, BAM, we are magic!

“Look, I’m having one. See,” she says as she pops a purple gumdrop into her mouth.

Curses on her! She makes it look so good. She is chewing it and I can hear the sugar coating crunching between her teeth. I must resist. I claw my mouth with my other toes.

“Are you all right?” she asks, lavender globs of gel clinging to her teeth as she speaks.

I try not to look at her, a very good choice because there crawling across the ground is a waterbug. I love waterbugs. Fast as lightning I pull my claws from my mouth fling my glue tongue out and bring back that waterbug for lunch, Oh, no! And half the surrounding dirt and leaf litter with it.

How could I have forgotten? Don’t eat things off the forest floor! Eat things from the air, crawling on trunks of trees or the stems of plants, even things on living leaves, but never things off the ground! I have tried so hard to train myself not to eat waterbugs as soon as I see them, but to wait until they have wandered someplace relatively clean. With a gluey tongue like mine, once you’ve snatched it, it’s in your mouth and toads have no real way to spit things out. Well there was that one time I saw Uncle Cedric eat a mouse and it came back out, but

since it clawed its way out technically I don't think that counts as having spit it out.

I personally try not to eat anything with fur, it gives me the creeps. I used to watch our neighbors' cat leveraging up hairballs and think it serves her right. If she would stop eating those mice she wouldn't have to throw them up. Honestly, fur just skives me.

"I thought you weren't hungry," the young witch says to me.

I have to swallow all this dirt to answer her, but I don't want to. It is inevitable I know, but I hate to be rushed. It has to be done, so I gulp.

"Wow, that's the worst look I've ever seen on your face," she continues, "bad bug?"

"Have you ever had a good bug?" I ask her.

"I don't eat bugs," she answers.

"Beneath you. Oh, I understand," I say, trying to sound casual.

"No, not at all, no, I love bugs. That's why I don't eat them. I don't eat living things, well nothing with a brain anyway," she finishes.

"I...I...don't know what to say," I stammer, forgetting about the mouth full of dirt I just ate, totally absorbed in thoughts of what this witch says she doesn't eat.

"I have to go find some water," she says. "Do you want any?"

"No, no, I'm fine," I mumble at her.

"Okay, but I'm going to leave you these gumdrops. Something to get that bad bug taste out of your mouth," she says, taking the three remaining gumdrops out of the bag, putting the bag down on the ground and placing the gumdrops on top of the paper bag. Then she tromps off in her mucky boots.

I snap up the gumdrops as soon as her back is turned. They taste like more. Sweets always do, don't they? I can't take it. I know there are more sugar crystals in the bottom of the bag. I just have to have them, and leave my leaf litter comfort and crawl into that bag. I am right! There is half a cup of sugar there in the bottom of the bag. Well, that could be an exaggeration, but there is plenty, let's put it that way. Witches have a thing about sweets. They love them, love them best. That's what my mother always said. I remember her saying there's

# Writing Raw

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a reason the witch in the story of Hansel and Gretel turned everyone into gingerbread and not broccoli.

Busy dragging tongue full after tongue full of gritty sweet pleasure into my mouth, I don't hear her return until she begins calling me. I hold still and hope she will think I've left. She is not fooled, and picks up the bag and carries me off, chattering about how close we are to a really nice pond. All I can think of is what life is going to be like as a potion.

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)