

The Toad in the Toilet

By Judith LeRoy

Now let's come to an understanding, here.

If toilet talk offends you ... if you're the kind of person who says, "Oh, please!" or "in bad taste!" when you hear the word "flush," "water closet," or "privy" ... turn the page right now—because this story is not for you.

But dedicated dog people are pretty much accustomed to picking up smelly brown things (preferably in the yard, not the bedroom) and cleaning up dog vomit (hopefully from the tile floor, not from the sofa cushions), so I figure I won't be in deep water mentioning mundane bathroom fundamentals like Kohler or American Standard commodes to most of you—will I? You can handle it, right?

Let me make one thing perfectly clear: This really happened. I'm not changing the sordid facts; I'm hardly even embellishing them. Case in point, I've avoided, as much as possible, over-analyzing my Beardies' opinions about the event—something I normally have no reluctance to do.

I realize that this story is dicey—it re-awakens childhood fears that slumber in each and every one of us. It arouses the ghosts of our three-year-old selves who perversely wondered, when watching the contents of a toilet bowl swirl, then gurgle out of sight, where everything went ... and "what would happen if I fell in?" It brings back those old, archetypal potty-training worries about what unthinkable, unspeakable things might be lurking deep down there in that toilet—far beyond human sight—waiting to grab you when you sit down, all bare-assed and vulnerable.

I promise you, once you've read this tale, you'll never casually seat yourself on a toilet again. You'll take a good look, first.

It all started about 11 a.m. in the bathroom, about ten feet down the hall from my study. I left my computer and wandered in, clutching the first draft of a newsletter that had to be distributed by late afternoon. There's a reason why one shouldn't drink three cups of coffee before 10 a.m. The rest of the morning is spent in the bathroom.

Still frowning at the printed page, I absent-mindedly sat down atop the white porcelain throne, as I have millions of times before. Suddenly, in a flash ... before I could even remember my purpose and reason for being there, something caromed off my naked bottom and splashed into the water beneath me. Icy droplets of water on my bare buttocks roused me from my newsletter draft. Perplexed, I looked down into the bowl. Then I shrieked.

There was a toad in the toilet!

A great, big, fat amphibian creature. So big that his short plump arms and longer legs touched opposite sides of the toilet bowl as he hovered just below the surface of the water. Eeek!!

Wait a minute, here! A toad in the toilet? I've heard about alligators in the sewers of New York City, but a toad in my toilet in central Florida?

As I watched, the creature tucked his arms close to his round body, kicked his muscular little legs and dove down, down, down. He disappeared, seemingly down the pipes, without even a flush to propel him.

My shriek was loud enough to raise the dead, but my two older, jaded Bearded Collies slept right through it. Two-year-old brown Beardie Leo, always looking for adventure, rounded the corner at breakneck speed and looked at me hopefully. He raised his eyebrows. What had I to offer?

"There's a toad in the toilet," I hollered at him. He looked at me inquisitively. "Well, there *was* a toad in the toilet," I said in a quieter voice. "At least I *think* there was a toad in the toilet." Leo looked at me dubiously, perhaps wondering whether I had lost my marbles. Should I count them?

He walked over and stared into the bowl—probably because I was staring into it. At the time, though, I hoped his response suggested an open mind ... that he was willing to believe the toad was at least possible.

My husband was a different case. He hustled in from his study on the other side of the house and looked at me strangely. Admittedly, he had good cause. My jeans were still down around my ankles, and as Leo and I leaned over and stared down the toilet bowl, one bare butt and one hairy one, it was probably a sight that would flummox any human who wandered onto the scene. My husband, being accustomed to the unusual, merely shook his head.

"What's this racket about?" he asked, looking from me to Leo. "What did you do, Leo? Throw another rawhide down the toilet?" Leo is a frequent perpetrator of malfeasance at our house, so my husband's accusation wasn't totally out of line. But Leo got an aggrieved look on his face (which he always does, guilty by not) and stared into the toilet bowl.

"There was a toad in the toilet," I hastily explained. My husband's arched eyebrows almost reached the ceiling ... his look of disbelief was profound.

"Well, I'd suggest you pull up your pants and put down the toilet lid so the toad doesn't leap out, hop to the kitchen, and get in the microwave. It's almost time for lunch." He ambled off, still shaking his head. I don't think he believed me.

To tell the truth, I had a moment of doubt myself. It was really unlikely that there was a toad in my toilet. I was so absorbed in the newsletter, maybe I just *thought* I saw a toad?

So, I hauled Leo's nose out of the toilet, lowered the lid, and went back to my study. Leo came along. Obviously, I was having more fun than anyone else that morning, so he was going to stick with me, just in case.

I'd like to tell you that I put that toad entirely out of my mind and got back to work, but that wasn't likely, was it? A toad in the toilet is no laughing matter—if there really were a toad in the toilet. Who would have guessed that a toad could come up the sewer pipes and into your toilet? Or could it? How else could he have gotten there? And if a toad could reside deep down there, what else might be lurking in those pipes under the house? God only knows what other toilet-dwelling creatures I've failed to notice through the years.

I couldn't help myself. I sneaked back into the bathroom, lifted the lid, and there, clinging to the rim of the toilet bowl, was my gigantic toad. I shrieked again and slammed down the lid, almost beaming poor Leo, who was right behind me trying to look in the bowl.

"You saw it, too!" I babbled at Leo. "It wasn't just my imagination!! I knew it!!"

My husband reappeared in the hall and stared at me.

"I told you!" I shouted. "There's a toad in the toilet!!"

He looked over my shoulder as I carefully lifted the lid. There was the toad, still clinging to the rim. He seemed as surprised to see us as we were to see him. My husband yelled, I shrieked, Leo barked, the other dogs came running, and the toad hopped back into the water and disappeared down into the depths, out of sight.

"Where did he go??" my husband demanded. Then he reached for the handle and flushed at least seven times. Leave it to a man if you want overreaction.

The bathroom had gotten really, really, crowded by then, considering all three Beardies were jockeying with us humans for the best toad-spotting sites.

"OK, OK," my husband said, taking charge. "We're all going to leave the bathroom, and I'm going to get the fishnet. We'll give the toad some time to think we've forgotten about him, and he'll get careless. Then I'll sneak back in here and scoop him out!"

I thought that maybe my husband was giving the creature more credit for rational thought than it deserved, but I kept my mouth shut.

"I'd just like to know how that toad got in the toilet," my husband mused. "I wouldn't have thought they could come out of the sewer line like that." He shook his head wonderingly.

All the dogs left the bathroom but Leo. He had an odd expression on his face—like maybe he knew something the rest of us didn't? Admittedly, this is hindsight on my part. All I knew at the time was that Leo lay down, put his chin on his paws and prepared to watch the toilet. He was getting ready for the next toad incident, but my husband made him leave with the rest of us.

Half an hour later, my husband tiptoed back to the bathroom, brandishing the fishnet. The Beardies and I, banished from the playing field, were permitted no closer than the living room, where we could only stand and wonder and listen to the subsequent action.

Splash, splash! "Got you, you little ... oh, damn! ... Get back here, you slippery devil! Damn! Blast!!"

This didn't sound good. The Beardies and I looked at each other and rushed

toward the bathroom. My husband was racing down the hall toward my study and just in front of him hopped a very large hunk of pond scum. I saw in a flash that it wasn't a toad at all. It was a very, very big, brownish-green frog. And could he ever *hop*!!

Frog disappeared into my study.

Slam! went the door as my husband followed. "Damn!" we heard again. Silence. A long pause. My husband emerged from my study. "The damn thing got behind the bookcase," he muttered. He walked to the kitchen and poured some Scotch, apparently, needing fortification. He grabbed his glass, strode into the living room and parked himself on the sofa. From the looks of it, he'd given up the hunt.

But I still had a frog in my study, hadn't I? I walked into the room, closed the door and wondered where to start. As Leo whined piteously on the other side of the closed door, I spent a very long 45 minutes removing books, moving the bookcases and barricading other frog-friendly nooks and crannies. After much lunging on my part and hopping on the frog's, I managed to get him in a vulnerable position, stranded in the middle of the room. He was either exhausted or tired of the game, and he held up a little white froggy flag. I, two-handedly grabbed him and carried him, croaking hoarsely, to the front yard. Leo was in hot pursuit, barking words of encouragement to either me or the frog—I wasn't sure which. I put the creature down on the front lawn and watched as it looked scathingly back over its shoulder (difficult for a neck-less creature) before indignantly hopping off. While Leo's nose pressed excitedly against the screen door, the other dogs had long since given up on the adventure. They didn't give a fig about things that hop, live in toilets, and neither bark nor baa.

I went to get a Scotch, too. As Jimmy Buffet said in one of his deservedly famous songs, "It's five o'clock somewhere."

My husband and I sprawled on the sofa, holding our drinks. By this time, it was his second one. While I was clearing my study of amphibians, he had managed to grab a nap ... apparently, his meager part of the chase had worn him out. The upshot was that neither of us had gotten much real work accomplished thus far today and the near future looked pretty bleak, too.

"My only problem is ... how do frogs and toads and stuff like that get into a sewer line and pop up in your toilet?" my husband marveled. He wasn't expecting an answer; he knew I was equally clueless.

But, thanks to Leo, I eventually had an answer to the question of how *that* particular frog got in *our* particular toilet. Let's just say it wasn't really the fault of our much-maligned sewer system.

A week later, during the 6 a.m. pre-breakfast romp, the Beardies barked raucously as the neighbor's cat chased a squirrel through our backyard. That is, everyone barked but Leo. I looked out the kitchen window and wondered about that.

It was strange because Leo's the most vociferous barker of them all. We don't call him "Big Mouth" for nothing. I went out the back door, shushed them and invited them in for breakfast. Leo uncharacteristically hung back from the rest of the pack as they trooped toward the house. Also strange; Leo has a rule about getting there—anywhere—first. I held the door open and waited for him as he sauntered in, dead last. Something was up. Leo scurried past my legs, glancing furtively up at me as he passed. He was wearing an inscrutable poker face—a scary look when worn by Leo. Hmm. Did he have something between his partially open jaws?

I walked into the kitchen behind the milling, ready-for-breakfast dogs and took another look. I was right. There was mischief afoot. Or rather, it was most probably clutched between Leo's jaws.

"Leo. What's in your mouth?"

Obligingly, Leo bent his head toward the kitchen floor, opened his mouth, and out hopped a frog. It wasn't the frog I had captured the week before, however. This one was a bit smaller and significantly greener. But then, this frog hadn't spent a lengthy period of time in anyone's toilet, so the fact he had more residual chlorophyll in his system and was greener wasn't all that surprising. Can you believe, I actually had that exact bizarre thought as I calmly looked at the frog crouched on my kitchen floor? Déjà vu all over again, in the words of the great baseball philosopher, Yogi Berra.

I may have been calm, but the frog looked distinctly startled—his eyes were very wide (then again, *all* frogs' eyes are wide, aren't they?). Startled or not, it was clear this frog was pondering his situation and his next move. "Under a cozy bush eating bugs one minute, sitting next to a General Electric refrigerator the next ... how did this happen?"

The probable answer, "Leo's Amphibian Transport Service. Free pickup and delivery." It didn't take a Mensa IQ to figure out how the earlier frog gained entrance to the house. Leo's doing some serious frog hauling these days.

As I wondered where the fishnet had gotten to, the frog recovered his wits and took a gigantic hop ... one that carried him over the heads of the circled Beardies. With a nasty splat, he ricocheted off my left shoulder and landed six feet away in the living room. Ugh! I looked down at the slimy frog juice on my clean terrycloth bathrobe and was no longer calm and reasonable. I was disgusted and pretty darn mad—totally frogged out you might say. Two in a week?? Mr. Frog must have sensed my ill humor and wasted no time apologizing for any inconvenience before hopping off.

“Go get your frog!” I yelled at Leo.

But, having the attention span of a gnat, Leo had already lost interest. He, like the other dogs, was more concerned about breakfast. I suspected his kibble would be frog-flavored this morning, and it served him right.

Shuddering as I doled out dog food and distributed the bowls, I wondered where the frog was heading. Hopefully, he'd find the hallway bathroom, just like his predecessor did. It's the closest available water supply. I wondered if I should try to lure him there with some dead flies? It's better to have a frog in the toilet than one sliming up your bed or mummifying behind your bureau, isn't it?

I got to pondering the potential advantages of frogs in toilets. There might be some. With a frog, if there's anything worse down there, lurking and waiting for a human's most defenseless moment ... well, it would have to get past the frog, first, wouldn't it? If those scary scenarios involving alligators in the sewers are true, wouldn't a frog provide a tasty distraction before that alligator took a bite out of an unsuspecting human backside?

I know this all sounds like the proverbial purse-out-of-sow's-ear kind of reasoning, but after you've had a frog in your toilet, you begin to have weird thoughts. And you approach your toilet with a little more respect. You never know what might be waiting there ... do you, now?