

### Shesa Fright and the Seven Snouts

My brothers and I race out the door as soon as the horn honks for quitting time. Working in the tissue factory really blows sometimes and the boss is a total lightweight, but it pays the bills. It also allows us to have a little holiday home in the woods where we are heading now. It's been a few months since we last ventured there, but we are all in need of a vacation after the flu season had us working overtime. Sniffy, Snotty, Booger, Crusty, Mucus, Phlegm and I, climb up into our Toyota Highlander and hit the road.

“Snotty, wind up your window, I'm freezing back here,” complains Sniffy.

“No, the fresh air clears up my sinuses,” Snotty replies with a snort.

“Nothing can clear that up,” Booger mutters, his pinkie firmly wedged up his nostril.

“Shut the window or I'll shut it for you!” Sniffy roars and hurls himself at Snotty, fists flying. They wrestle, the car swerves and veers dangerously over the rocky terrain. I love the brotherly bickering, but I have to say I'm relieved when Snotty resumes driving. Thank goodness for seatbelts or one of us could be seriously injured.

The sun is losing its battle to stay high in the sky when our cosy cottage comes into view. Nestled between shady tree ferns and the beautiful, but noxious, crimson Oleander tree, it's a welcome sight.

“Hang on a minute,” Phlegm says in a gurgly voice, “who left the lights on?”

He's right, the house is glowing with illumination. Stepping down from the vehicle we approach with trepidation. We're strong in number but short on stature and therefore, extremely nervous at what awaits us. We attempt stealth but, unfortunately, the runny noses, clearing of throats and general snivelling alert the intruder to our presence. The seven of us huddle close together, shuffling forward at a snail's pace as the sound of angry footsteps grows nearer. I reach for the door knob, my hand trembles, the cottage door is wrenched from my grasp, sending me tumbling backwards into my brothers who all fall like dominoes into the garden. I squint through clouds of dust making their escape from within our abode, hoping to catch sight of our uninvited guest.

“Oh no,” groans Sniffy from his position at the bottom of the pack, “I can't reach my tissue and my nose is dripping like a tap.”

“Aaahhchooo!” Mucus and Snotty sneeze in unison.

Booger raises bloodshot, watery eyes to me, “Dave, maybe we shouldn't have come here in the spring, the pollen is aggravating our allergies and playing havoc with our hay-fever.”

We scramble to our feet, bodies clambering over each other as though locked in a game of 'Twister', searching pockets for something to stem the flow of slime, sliding unbidden from our nasal passages.

“Right,” I say bravely after an embarrassingly loud bout of nose blowing, “show yourself!”

A silhouette emerges from our cabin and we gasp in horror.

## Shesa Fright and the Seven Snouts

“It’s pretty....ugly,” whispers Booger.

“Hideous,” Snotty agrees.

A surly teenage girl glares down at us. She is dressed entirely in black, her acned face as pale as a ghost, greasy, jet-black hair gelled in all directions, piercings protruding from her pencilled eyebrows, blackhead-dotted nose and black cracked lips.

“Whadya want?” she snaps.

“Uh, we’re the Snouts. This is Mucus, Phlegm, Snotty, Sniffy, Booger, Crusty and I’m Dave. This is our house. Um, who are you?” I ask politely.

“Shesa Fright and I was here first.”

We jump as she slams the door in our faces, sending further puffs of dust into our already itchy eyes. Blinking in bewilderment, we glance at each other, unsure of our next move.

“Okay,” I say, “I think we should just go inside and ask her to leave.”

“Did you get a good look at her? I’m not going anywhere near her.” Sniffy says and backs away.

“Me neither,” chorus the rest of my siblings, cowering under the mozzie zapper.

“Follow me,” I say with more certainty than I feel. I yank open the door and stride in; as much as I can stride on two tiny legs; and face our snarly squatter. “Now look here...,” I begin then stop abruptly. A horrible smell assails my sensitive schnoz. The girl is crouched on the bare wooden floor, surrounded by empty coke cans, pizza boxes and half-empty chip packets. Once he notices the debris, Phlegm’s hands fly to cover his gaping mouth. Immediately he runs to the cupboard, grabs the broom, sweeps up the crumbs, coughing as he disturbs months of slumbering dirt, shakes out a garbage bag and proceeds to collect all the rubbish, only relaxing once the floor is cleared.

“Have you got OCD or something?” the strange girl asks rudely.

Phlegm blushes. He has only recently been diagnosed and is still in denial.

“Listen, we just want our house back for the weekend,” I plead, “maybe we can help you move?”

“I’m not going home,” she pouts. “My mum’s dead and dad remarried some old witch...”

“That’s a bit harsh,” Snotty remarks.

“No, seriously, she’s a witch. My dad’s, like, massively rich from making reality TV shows. The old crone went to audition for one of them, decided instead to spike mum’s coffee with poison, give my pop some love potion; he married her, left her everything in his will then she offs him as well! Not that I care. My parents thought I was a freak, wanted me to be more like Cinderella and help around the house. Like that’s gonna happen! I’m no clean freak like Phlegm. What’s wrong with cobwebs and tarantulas?”

Sweat breaks out on Phlegm’s forehead.

## Shesa Fright and the Seven Snouts

“I didn’t mind sharing the 200 year old Gothic mansion on the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest with my step-monster. I never saw her until she hung all these ugly old mirrors everywhere and sang to them, like, all the time. “*Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the prettiest of them all?*” or some weird shit like that. You can’t even see in them, they’re all misty, like smoke’s trapped inside. I mean, what’s up with that? Sometimes she pretended the mirrors answered her. It totally creeped me out.” Shesa shudders.

While she sits picking off her “Bloodcurdle Black” nail polish, I confer with my brothers. “Let’s invite the stepmother over for dinner, they’ll realise how much they miss each other and reconcile. We just have to convince Shesa she’s better off at home, okay?”

Between sneezes and wheezes the boys agree to my plan. Booger and Sniffy force Shesa into the bathroom with shampoo, soap, exfoliant, and deodorant to scrub away the dead skin cells that have skunkified her body. Mucus and Phlegm begin to cook a delicious meal and the rest of us contemplate our visit to the wicked witch.

The journey to the Fright residence is fraught, especially for grown men averaging 3.5 feet in height. We get tangled in talking tree roots, chased by hungry heffalumps and nuzzled by amorous ewoks. A collective sigh echoes around the bushland when we emerge intact and gasp at the gargoyle perched on the porch of the biggest building we have ever seen. When the door finally opens, our knuckles bruised from incessant knocking, we ogle the most stunning woman we have ever laid eyes on, I’m not joking, she is dead set gorgeous! I explain the situation to her and I have to admit she seems a little disappointed that her step-daughter is alive and well, but she agrees to accompany us back through the Forbidden Forest for dinner. She even brings a basket of fruit which I think is a lovely gesture.

Back at our humble home we are greeted by four awestruck little men and a wonderful aroma.

“Hello,” the devilish damsel purrs, “aren’t you all just so cute.” Our faces burn so hot we almost self-combust.

“Oh brother,” Shesa rolls her eyes as she enters the room.

“Wow!” I exclaim, “you look...different....so...clean.” Her previously ghostly pallor is now a pale shade of pink, pimples not so angry, hair shiny, nails no longer grubby. She’s still no oil painting but it’s a vast improvement. Catching sight of her reflection in the hall mirror she’s taken aback, has a second look. I’m not sure she’s impressed because she frowns before turning to face us.

“Why don’t you take my stepmother for a tour of the house while I arrange some flowers for the table?” She offers innocently.

Seven infatuated dwarves eagerly lead the delectable murderess away. We return in five minutes to find Shesa smiling smugly, hastily scribbled place cards indicate seating arrangements. A few tussles occur as my brothers and I attempt to swap places to be as near the alluring assassin as possible.

“This soup is to die for, Mucus,” the girl says, a little too enthusiastically.

It does taste good and before long burps replace slurps. Shesa really needs to learn some manners. Her stepmother finishes her meal and offers Shesa a shiny red apple, “Here, my dear, I

## Shesa Fright and the Seven Snouts

brought you a peace offering, I know how much you love the apples from our garden.” Suddenly her enigmatic smile becomes an ugly grimace. Her exquisite features contort and she clutches her stomach, strange gurgling sounds emanate from within her statuesque frame.

“What have you done to me?” she croaks then slides off her chair and convulses violently on our floorboards for a couple of seconds. Helplessly we watch until her bodacious body ceases twitching. I rush to her side and she ages dramatically. Her spell over me has broken or maybe I’m just really shallow because I have to admit, I no longer fancy her. She appears to melt until all that is left is a steaming puddle and some nasty fumes. Phlegm reaches for the disinfectant.

“Wow that Oleander bush really is deadly!” Shesa exclaims. “I can finally claim my inheritance.”

“How much did you use?” I ask in disbelief.

“I crushed a few of the leaves into her soup when you were showing her around. I had to make sure she carked it. Hmm, that soup was delicious.”

“No!” I yell as Shesa runs her finger, stained from crushing Oleander leaves, around her dinner bowl and licks it. Her eyes roll back in her head and she collapses. Only a minute amount was ingested so she remains in a coma.

“Hey there’s a book of spells here in the sorceress’s handbag, it may have an antidote for Oleander poisoning.” Crusty flicks through the pages while we wait anxiously. “Here we go Oh, this could take a while. Only true love’s first kiss will awaken her.” He snaps the book shut and stares at us. “We did our best but she’s no Belle is she? She can’t cook or clean, how do we market her?”

Booger brainstorms and Shesa’s plight is plastered on every tissue box we manufacture. Eventually, a passing musician with dreadlocks and a tongue stud, Hank Pongwhiffy, gazes at Shesa. We wait expectantly, he lowers his mouth and..... their piercings interlock. It’s a little awkward as he tries to prise himself off her she opens her eyes and pushes him away!

“Eww, what are you doing?”

Puzzled, the young man answers, “You woke up, you’re my one true love, now we marry and live happily ever after.”

“In your dreams, loser!” Shesa says indignantly, “I’m too young to settle down. I don’t even know you. Thanks for saving my life, now bugger off!”

Hank lopes away, dejectedly.

“Shesa, what are you doing? He’s your soul mate,” Crusty cries anxiously.

“Don’t think so. I’m 17, I’m loaded and I’m gonna travel for my gap year. I’m thinking Transylvania. I’ve heard there’s a cool guy there who loves bats and everything Goth. Sounds more like my kinda guy.”

**The End**

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