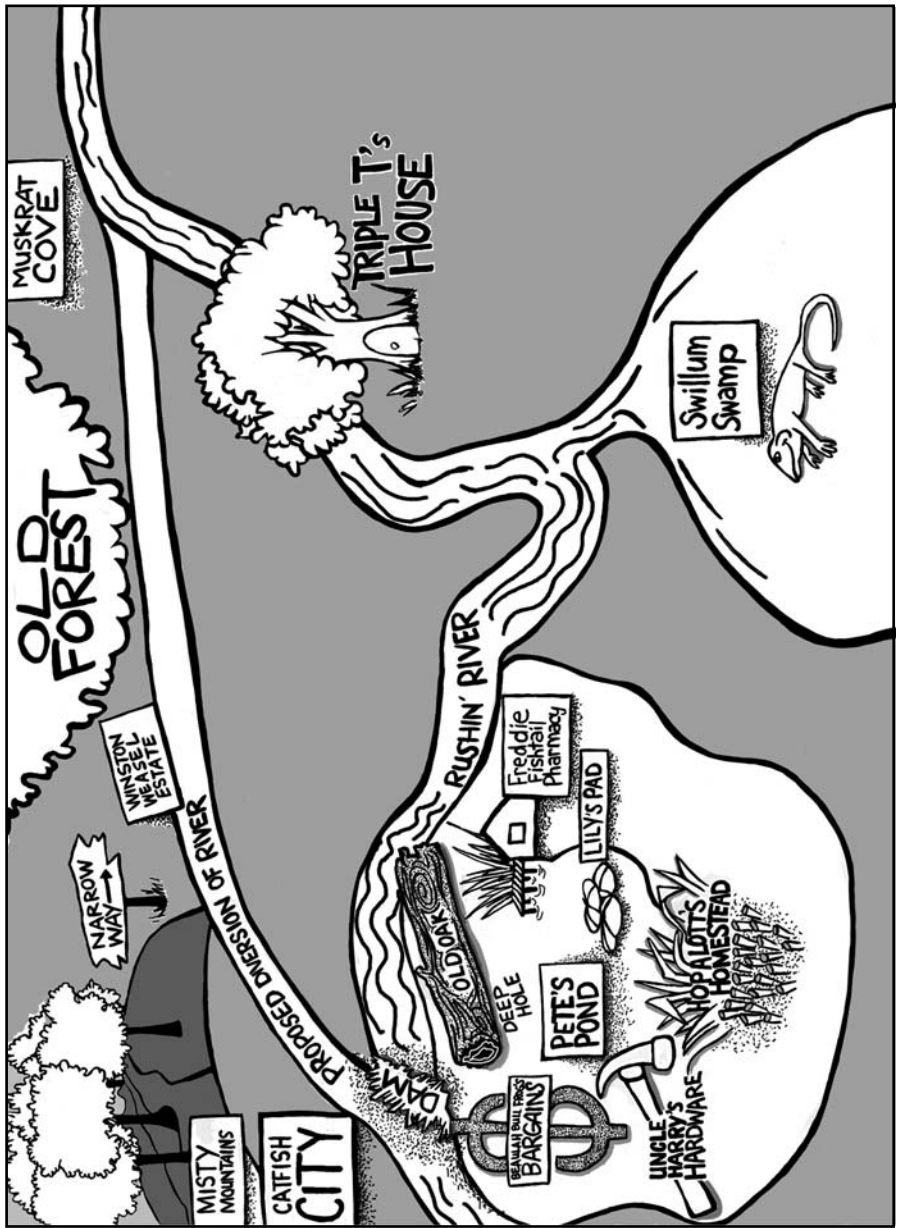


Foolish Diversion



Book One

Foolish Diversion



Triple T And Herman Mysteries

by Jeanne M. Sievert

illustrated by Deana Riddle

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Chapter One



Terrence Tree Toad opened the heavy, wooden front door to his home, the Big Oak, and stepped out into the cool morning. Sitting down on the front stoop, Triple T felt the slight breeze wafting in over the Rushin' River from the Misty Mountains to the west. The wind carried with it the hint of Autumn.

Triple T liked Autumn. It was a time of looking forward to. It was a time when squirrels romped in the trees, when cool breezes encouraged walks to one's neighbors' for a nice cuppa tea. Or even a cake or two. And it was a most welcome change from the brutal heat of summer.

This summer had been the worst. Day after day, no rain. The ground dried and cracked. Trees wilted in the heat. The River level fell lower and lower. Unless the Drought ended, it wouldn't be long before only the smallest boats would be able to travel from Catfish City to Muskrat Cove.

But this cool breeze must be a sign of better times to come, thought Triple T. And as he took in a deep breath of the fresh air, he thought back to the time he had first stumbled upon Catfish County.

It had been shortly after he'd finished studying journalism with his friend, Rodney Raccoon, in Mega Mesa, the capital of Big Sky County. Rodney had stayed. But Triple T had been anxious to see more of the world. For some time, he had traveled without any particular purpose. Then one day he'd arrived in Catfish County. He found the big, abandoned oak on the bank of the Rushin' River near Muskrat Cove. There he had made his home.

And it was there he and his partner, Herman Hoppalott, had started their own newspaper, the *What's Up?*. It was the only source of news for most of Catfish County, especially the small communities of Pete's Pond and Swillum Swamp. The *What's Up?* reported on every important event. In fact, T remembered with a start, they were supposed to be covering the presentation that was taking place at the City Council meeting this morning.

Triple T took one last deep breath. There was work to be done.

"Herman, oh, Her—man," sang out Triple T, loud enough to be heard from the front stoop. "What are you doing in there?"

The young frog, Herman, called back from the kitchen, "I'm just getting breakfast together, T. It'll be ready soon."

Triple T shook his head in wonder. What could possibly be taking that frog so long?

Impatient to get on with the business of the day,

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Triple T got up from the stoop and walked through the front door, past the study and into the kitchen.

“Herman, you know we have to get to Catfish City early this morning. Our readers are depending on us to be at the presentation before the City Council. Surely that is more important than eating. Couldn’t we just skip breakfast for once?”

“For once?” responded Herman quickly. “If it weren’t for me, you’d never eat breakfast at all. Besides, I like to have my daily glass of Winston Weasel Estate Blackberry Juice. If I don’t, I won’t feel right for the rest of the day. This’ll only take a minute.”

Unlike Triple T who was tall, with a sleek physique, Herman was more round. His small stature combined with his love of all things edible had produced what could only be called a rather pudgy effect. But this fact rarely dampened, and perhaps was partly responsible for, Herman’s general good humor.

And so, Herman’s easy-going nature found no irony in Winston Weasel, the new owner, touting as an “estate” what was really little more than a bedraggled old farm in the Old Forest. These grand airs, unusual for denizens of Catfish County, had suggested to Triple T and Herman that the circumstances surrounding Winston Weasel’s recent acquisition of the property might be a good subject for a future feature article in the *What’s Up?*

As he sat down at the small breakfast table, Triple T looked around their cozy kitchen and shook his head again. Triple T had learned there was no point in trying to make Herman hurry, if Herman had no mind to.

“Here, T. I’ve made you a fresh bagel with soft cream cheese,” said Herman as he laid the plate on the rough-hewn wooden table in front of Triple T. “Now, make sure you drink all of the juice. We don’t know when we might have time for lunch.”

Taking a bite out of the fresh bagel, Triple T smiled at Herman’s solicitous tone. Herman was right. Without him Triple T would probably never eat at all. T liked thinking more. He liked solving complex problems, absorbing monumental amounts of information, the more detailed the better, and embracing change at a dizzying rate. On the other hand, Herman preferred a quieter, more relaxed pace, where change occurred gradually, if at all. It was these differences that made their partnership so effective.

But this morning there was little time for reflection. They didn’t want to be late for the presentation. It was a most unusual event for the City Council. An expert scientist had been called in from nearby Big Sky County to address the problem of the worst Drought that Catfish County had ever experienced. The situation was threatening the economy of the entire region. Something had to be done!

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Triple T felt very strongly that he and Herman should be there to make sure all the residents of Catfish County got the whole story. The small communities, one of them being Pete's Pond—Herman's hometown, were entitled to know what the politicians in Catfish City were up to.

So the two frogs quickly ate their simple meal. After tidying up the kitchen, they grabbed their note pads and pens. Proceeding to ready their small boat for the trip to Catfish City, Triple T and Herman walked down to the wharf near the foot of the Big Oak. There was the SS *Berkeley*, tethered in its customary place. Triple T had fashioned the boat by hand from a giant acorn that had fallen in the Old Forest. He loved its smooth curves and the sound the oar made as it pushed through the Rushin' River as it moved swiftly towards Muskrat Cove. One of T's favorite pastimes was floating down the river, watching the trees lining the banks just slip by. But there would be no time for a relaxing float today. In fact, because of the bagel and the blackberry juice, they'd have to put some real muscle into their rowing, if they were to make it upstream to Catfish City in time for the meeting.

But, just as they were about to shove off from the small wharf, they heard a furious scrambling in the treetop overhead. And in just a moment who should come into view but no other than young George, followed quickly by his uncle, Sammy Squirrel.

“Go right down and apologize to Triple T, George,” said Sammy in a tone that tried to be parental but couldn’t hide the fact that, of his three nephews, George was clearly the favorite.

Calling up to Sammy, Triple T asked, “Now what would George have to apologize about?” The question feigned surprise, although Triple T knew that, of the four squirrel tenants, George was certainly the most high-spirited and the most likely to get into mischief.

“It really was an accident,” began George in an attempt to beat his uncle to the telling of the story. “You see, me and Jeffrey, that is, Jeffrey and I,” corrected George quickly, “well, we were playing a game of catch. And, well, I can throw pretty hard and, well, Jeffrey can’t really catch all that well. So one time the acorn missed Jeffrey and hit your window instead. And well, you see, it was a pretty good throw and so, well, your window broke. But we’ve already got it fixed, so...”

“George, after all of that, I didn’t hear any apology,” said Sammy sternly.

“Oh, yeah, and I’m sorry. I really am.” George hung his head sheepishly.

Triple T winked at Sammy and said, “Now, George, you’re just going to have to be more careful, aren’t you? And maybe you can teach your brother Jeffrey how to catch? But, since the damage has been repaired, I suppose we can let it go this time. Just

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don't let it happen again, OK?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Triple T. Nothing like that will ever happen again. You'll see," said George, delighted to be let off with such a gentle reprimand. Then, before Sammy could make him do anything else, George scampered off.

Sammy silently mouthed the word "Thanks" and went back to his home in the upper branches of Triple T's tree. Triple T looked at Herman. They both smiled. Having the Squirrel family as their upstairs neighbors was a constant source of entertainment.

But then remembering their mission, Triple T said abruptly, "Let's go, Herman. We don't want to be late for this important presentation. I've heard that most of the local politicians will be there. Should give us a lot of material for our next issue."

And with that, Triple T climbed into the SS *Berkeley* and extended a webbed hand to give Herman a lift up. Once settled in their customary places, Triple T threw off the line that had tethered them to the wharf and they began to paddle in the direction of Catfish City.