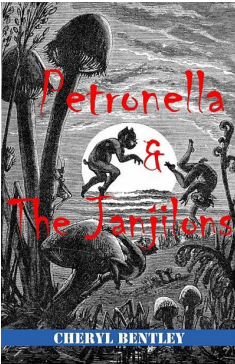


Petronella and the Janjilons



The Janjilons are not what they seem. They look like a type of monkey but they are really children. How did they turn into Janjilons? And could it happen to anyone?

By Cheryl Bentley

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Cheryl Bentley grew up in Manchester and now lives in Cambridgeshire with her husband, two children and their dog. She works part-time as a children’s nurse. She has been an avid reader ever since she was a child. In her free time, Cheryl likes reading to her children, painting, jewellery making and taking her dog for walks. She says “I have an over-active imagination and like to write stories for my children.”

About the book

Behind this mystery is someone evil, Judge Ormerod who wants to be the next Duke of Westshire. With the help of three weird sisters, he has to rid the land of clever children from being an obstacle to him. The Janjilons work for him as the three sisters mete out punishment and keep them locked up.

Petronella starts to look into these strange happenings. But time is running out because when the Judge no longer needs the Janjilons, they will be destroyed.

Reviews

“Loved this book – engaged with it straight away - especially liked Betty. Delightful book. Well recommended.” - *Lorraine Baker, Bookseller, Wales*

“... a great book for reluctant readers ... A good fantasy read with good vs. evil” - *Ann Klausling, Bookseller, Books-a-Million, USA*

“There are three witches, a hidden school and a lot of evil in this story. You’ll meet characters that will surprise you and the ending is great.

“Ms. Bentley does not write boring books. I can see a young one reading this book more than once. Maybe they can even write a story of their own...” - *Jo Ann Hakola, The Book Faerie, Bookseller, USA*

“You’ll have to jump on this fast moving fairy tale thriller to find out what happens...” - *Bill Baker, Teacher, USA*

“...the story was well done, Petronella a good strong female lead.

“A fun and exciting tale of mischief and the resulting troubles, of problem solving and the outcome of working toward a goal.” - *Linda Barrett, Bookseller, USA*

“When I finished reading *Petronella and the Janjilons*, the first thing that came into my mind was, ‘I need to read more Nancy Drew.’ I kind of felt that it’s somehow like Nancy Drew.

“I like it because its contents are really action-packed. The writing is really alive and the author somehow connected with me through her writing.

“If you want a quick and light fantasy mystery read, then maybe you could try reading this.” - *Teenage reviewer, Philippines*

“*Petronella and Edmundus Chewnik* live in their Manor House in Fort Willow. Their friend, the Duke of Westshire, a fair and heir-less man, has just died. Before going, he left explicit instructions as to how the next Duke will be chosen. The problem is, one of his councillors (as the British spell it) wants that dukedom more than he can fathom. That’s when the trouble starts.

“It seems that the boys of Fort Willow are all being offered free places at a nearby boarding school. Most parents here can’t afford it, so they jump at the chance to educate their sons at a prestigious school. But Soloman, the local orphan, doesn’t think anything good is going on. So he enlists the help of Petronella to see if she can sort things out. But before she can get started, Soloman is discovered in the woods by three witchy types and the judge who was responsible for sending the boys off to school. Unfortunately, they see him, and he soon learns of their nefarious plans.

“A cute story, this book is the second in the series starring Petronella. Part Grimm Brothers, part Enid Blyton and part Tarzan, it’s sure to please kids looking for adventure.” - *Audrey Wilkerson, Reviewer, USA*

Excerpt

CHAPTER 1

One evening Petronella’s big black cat, Maalox, was happily purring on the mat in front of the fireplace when the family’s peace was broken in the very middle of Petronella having tea with her husband, Edmundus. A frenzied knocking pounded on the front door. Petronella looked through the window to see who it was. Soloman, the local orphan, was standing there beating his fists on their heavy oak door.

“It’s Soloman Brix,” Petronella said. She turned to Edmundus with a worried face. “It seems he’s in some sort of distress.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll go,” Edmundus said.

When Edmundus had only opened the door a little, he could already see that Petronella was right. Soloman was definitely in a bad state.

“What is it?” Edmundus asked. “Come in! Come in!” Edmundus took Soloman by the arm and gently led him to one of their cushion armchairs. “Do sit down. Now take a minute or two to calm yourself. I’ll get you a nice cup of tea and one of Petronella’s delicious cup cakes.”

Soloman sat shivering in the armchair. Maalox got up and rubbed against Soloman's legs as if to comfort him. Both Petronella and Edmundus sat quietly and waited for Soloman to drink at least some of his tea and to calm down a little.

Petronella said: "Come, Soloman, do tell us what's the matter."

"There's something strange happening in the village," Soloman began. "Young boys of my age, I'm twelve, are disappearing. A few of my friends have gone missing and I have no idea where they are. And now my friend Adrian Simnel has gone, too."

"Well, surely their parents know where they are? Otherwise they'd have gone out to look for them. They'd have told the police or come to see Edmundus or..." Petronella said.

Soloman was too worked up to let her finish. "No, no, you don't understand. Their parents think they are at a boarding school."

"But, they ARE at boarding school," Edmundus answered. "Only the other day I was speaking to Mrs Simnel and she was telling me how happy she was that her son, Adrian, had been accepted at the Janjilon Education Centre for Boys. An extremely good school in her view. They're quite strict there, she was saying. They won't let boys go home whenever they like."

"Yes, but, you see, I think there's something very strange about this school. I've tried to find out where the place is and no-one seems to know where it is exactly. Somewhere on the other side of the forest, they all say. I know the forest like the back of my hand, I go there nearly every day, I've looked for the school and can't find it."

"Well, the forest is huge. There are more things in that forest than we can imagine," Petronella said. "I've never been there myself. Though I used to live in the woods in Charis Cottage, I didn't dare venture into the forest beyond."

"It's true, the forest is enormous, and I agree that I may not have seen it all. But how come boys who go to the Janjilon Education Centre are never seen again?"

"Mrs Simnel was telling me that visits are not allowed. The reason being that if the boys see their friends or families again they might want to go back home. She thought that Adrian was quite wayward and needed some stiff education," Edmundus said.

"No, I'm sure that something horrible is happening. Boys can't just go off and not be heard of again," Soloman said firmly.

Edmundus was sure that Soloman was worrying without reason. He had worked himself up into such a frenzy for nothing. Petronella, on the other hand, thought that it was a little odd. Whatever the truth was, it would be worth looking into this, to find out what had really happened. After all, it wouldn't hurt to know where these boys were. Would it?

"We could try and find out," Petronella said to Soloman.

"Would you? Would you really? So you do believe me?" Soloman was happy that someone had taken him seriously.

"I don't know what to believe," Petronella said. "I like to keep an open mind. And I like to see clearly. So I think we should look into this if only to put your mind at rest."

“Haven’t you been approached by the school?” Edmundus asked Soloman.

“No, sir. Judge Ormerod has never asked me if I’d like to go. Maybe he doesn’t know about me. He usually persuades parents to send their boys there, but mine are dead.”

“Judge Ormerod has done a lot for the children of Fort Willow and for the county of Westshire. As Education Councillor of Westshire he has taken his job seriously and created such a good school for Westshire – his home county. It has been one of the county’s finest achievements. Do you mean to say we are not to trust Judge Ormerod?” Edmundus asked Petronella.

“No, I’m not saying that. I’m just saying that Soloman is worried and we should help him get these thoughts out of his head. I’m sure there is nothing wrong about all this.”

“I think this is dangerous, Petronella,” Edmundus said. “Judge Ormerod is not a man to be messed with. You don’t know how powerful he is.”

“Do you realise what you have just said, Edmundus?” Petronella asked. “You have just said that Judge Ormerod is a man who frightens others. A clever man with a difficult character, and a quick temper, I’ve heard.”

“He calls on families telling them how, when their boys grow up, they’ll be able to get good jobs working for the government, or in banks, and so on, instead of having to live the hard life of woodcutters, like most men here today,” Soloman said.

“I know Judge Ormerod gives some people the jitters, but he is an upright man, I’m sure of that,” Edmundus said.

“I’m not so sure,” Petronella said to herself, under her breath. Then she said loudly: “There’s no harm in clearing this up. Judge Ormerod does not need to know that we are investigating this, does he?” Petronella asked, turning to Soloman.

“Thank you so much, Petronella,” Soloman said. “I’m so happy that you are taking me seriously. I am worried about Adrian. He is my best friend. Told me lots of times that he would not go off to the Janjilon Education Centre whatever his parents said, but they sent him there all the same.”

“I’ve heard that Judge Ormerod is a fascinating and persuasive man. Maybe Adrian’s parents were taken in by him...”

“Petronella!” Edmundus interrupted her. “It’s you who should realise what you’re saying. You’re saying that Judge Ormerod is somehow involved in taking boys away from their families and hiding them away. You’re saying he’s dishonest.”

Petronella and Edmundus had never argued before. He was such a good man that he never thought other people could be horrible. Petronella turned to Soloman and said: “I will come and see you one day soon and we can talk about this.”

Soloman was happy with that. He left to go back to his home where he lived on his own.

CHAPTER 2

Later that evening Petronella and Edmundus heard the sad news that Duke Merrick had died. He had been ill for some time, so the news was not altogether unexpected. He had died without leaving a son or daughter to take his place. Duke Merrick had issued an order that after his death, whoever

found his Golden Shield, with his lion's head emblem on it, could become Duke of Westshire. Notices were nailed to trees around the county showing the Golden Shield with under it the words:

*Whosoever findeth my Golden Shield with Lion's Head,
Shall be the rightful Duke of Westshire in my stead.
Clue: Buried in the forest amongst stones and worms
you shall find it.*

And it was duly signed: "The Right Honourable Alfred Charles Merrick, the Seventh Duke of Westshire."

Duke Merrick had hidden the Golden Shield in a place so vast that it would be nearly impossible to find. Until the Golden Shield was found, Westshire would be ruled by the group of councillors who had helped Duke Merrick during his rule – this included the dreaded Judge Ormerod.

After Duke Merrick's solemn funeral, most of the people of Westshire set off in search of the Golden Shield. Some people hunted in groups and wandered off in threes and fours to look for this precious relic. The forest seemed never-ending. Some said that Duke Merrick hid it up on the mountain. Others thought the Golden Shield was buried somewhere on flat land. But nobody knew for certain, so the search parties could be seen roaming all over Westshire hoping to stumble across the Shield.

Soloman had, of course, also heard the news. Everyone in Fort Willow, and in the whole of Westshire, was talking about this. Soloman was an only child and his parents had had high hopes for him. He'd had a very happy childhood up to the age of five. But one night his parents died in a coach-and-horses accident while on their way back from a ball. The horses had been frightened by something standing in its way, right in the middle of the road in front of them. Some kind of weird animal. So the coachman pulled the reins suddenly causing the coach to tip over and tumble down into the valley beneath them.

For the next six years, Soloman lived with his grandmother and when she too died, he went on living in her house on his own. She had left him some money, in a pot on the mantelpiece, but it was slowly running out. Luckily, Soloman could play the violin very well so he made some money by playing sweet music on street corners. People who knew of his plight would give generously.

For the rest of the time, he'd go walking around, taking his books with him. All the books he read were adventure stories, mostly about pirates. He'd imagine that he was a sea-captain attacked by pirates but with his skill and bravery, he was able to save his crew and the ship's cargo. He would sit and read wherever he found a pleasant place. Sometimes on slopes, other times near the river, and when it was raining he would find shelter and peace in a derelict house or a church.

But on this particular day he was strolling through the forest. When his feet started aching he sat down and propped himself up against the trunk of a tree. Day dreaming about adventures, while squinting through the trees, Soloman thought he saw a hut. Yes, it was some kind of rickety wooden construction. Maybe it belonged to a woodcutter – a place for keeping his tools. He decided to go and take a look. Peeping in through its one-and-only window, Soloman saw that it certainly was no tool shed.

There were two people in the hut. A wrinkled old woman in a ragged black dress and a finely dressed gentleman, in an ermine cloak. Soloman pushed the window open a crack to hear what they were saying.

"What can I do for you, Judge Ormerod?" said the old woman sitting crossed-legged on the straw

floor of what seemed to be her hut.

“Look here, you old hag, you know very well why I’m here. Why else would people come to visit you? Only one thing. And one only. I want my fortune told.”

“Aha, it will cost you a pretty penny, so it will,” she said in a spiteful little voice. “Especially as you are a rich man. Every one knows you. Councillor to our Duke Merrick – and always scheming to take his place when he was alive. Backed up by that wicked wife of yours. Up to no good, so you are.”

“Gesuela, how dare you talk to a Judge like that?! Do you not realise I can have you and your two weird sisters thrown into jail and whipped daily? I am one of the councillors of the government, soon to be Duke of Westshire, if you will help me.”

“You wouldn’t harm us. Our supernatural powers can get the better of you any day, Judge Muck. That’s what you should be called.”

“Make haste, old hag; I haven’t got all day what with my important duties and those servants of mine to keep in line. They all stop working when I’m away from my home. Lazy lot.”

“You work those people to the bone for very little reward. You are a true tyrant,” she said.

“Enough of that, woman. Stop it right this minute, I say. Immediately. I did not come here to hear your opinions about me. When will you predict my future?”

“I can tell you your fortune tonight. Predictions work far better under a full moon,” she said.

“That cannot be. I cannot wait for a moment longer. We need to get on with it. Where can I sit?”

“On the straw on the floor. Where else?”

Judge Ormerod looked around him. Most of the straw was glued together by mud. He took his ermine cloak off and threw it down on the spot that looked cleanest. Tossing back his long black hair, he sat on the lining of his cloak.

“You must cross your legs,” Gesuela said.

“I can’t. Have you seen the size of the stirrups on my boots?” he asked.

“Then you’ll have to take them off. It won’t work unless you follow my orders.”

He did as he was told. This witch was about to do him a favour so he didn’t want to push his luck too far.

When she saw that he was in the right position, she started:

“Gismonda! Gasmina!” she called out loud for her younger twin sisters to come. Soloman went and hid behind a tree as he saw two horrid-looking creatures clumsily stomping up the pathway to the house. But they were not identical. Gasmina had a kinder face.

“Gismonda! Gasmina!” Gesuela angrily called even louder than before.

Judge Ormerod looked at Gesuela in disgust. ...then Judge Ormerod got the fright of his life. Two of the ugliest women he had ever set his eyes on appeared at the doorway of the hut. He thought they

must have been at least a hundred years old each. He'd never want to reach that age, if it meant looking anything like that. But he was only thirty, and he had a lot of problems right now, without thinking so far ahead.

"Twins, where have you two been? Frolicking in the forest, I suspect," Gesuelda said to her weird sisters.

"No, we were in the forest but we weren't frolicking, I promise, dear sister," said Gismonda, crossing her heart. "No, no frolicking," Gasmina repeated.

"Cross your heart, Gasmina," Gesuelda ordered.

Gasmina nervously did as she was told.

"Then, what WERE you doing?"

"Killing wild pigs," the two chimed together.

Judge Ormerod felt sick.

"Well, that's alright, then," Gesuelda said, relieved. "But, you two must stop that carry-on immediately. Go back into the forest and bring me logs. They must be:

one part: twisted pine wood

three parts: fungi-ridden willow

and three parts: diseased red maple.

Now, off you go, both of you and be quick about it."

Soloman moved to the other side of the tree trunk so as not to be seen by the wild sisters who, by this time, were running in the other direction shouting at the top of their voices.

Judge Ormerod lowered his head. His earrings jangled.

"Sit up straight and be still," Gesuelda ordered.

Gesuelda suddenly sprinted up to her feet and, as quick as lightning, she grabbed the handle at the end of a long black chain, hanging from the ceiling, with both her hands – pulling down on it with all her weight, until a big badly-blackened cauldron was lowered to exactly 13.7 inches from the ground. She let go of the chain. It swung to-and-fro creaking as it went, hitting Judge Ormerod squarely on the nose with its first swing.

"Ouch, be careful woman. You hurt me," Judge Ormerod said.

"Oh, stop being such a baby. What is it you want to know?" she asked.

"My only aim in life is to be Duke of Westshire. That's what I've lived for. Of course, you know I was Councillor of Education in Duke Merrick's government. What young people need is good schooling. They should be taught discipline, good manners and how to respect their elders... The Janjilon Education Centre was the best idea I ever came up with... we all know about that, don't we?" he asked Gesuelda while sniggering.

"This is no time to talk about The Janjilon Education Centre. Come on, get to the point. Tell me

exactly why you're here," she said sternly.

"My wife wants me to be Duke of Westshire. Then, of course, she'll be a Duchess. She wants this as much as I do. I have got to find that Golden Shield. Do you understand? I want to ask you if I will ever be Duke of Westshire. Can you tell me that?"

"Oh, it will take the most potent recipe I have, so it will. I must get my recipe book out and set the ingredients out before my sisters come back." She looked out into the forest through the hut's doorway, and saw something moving in the shade of the trees. It looked like a person.

"Just a moment," Gesuelda whispered to Judge Ormerod, "I need to go out into the forest a moment. I think someone is spying on us."

Gesuelda was careful to creep quietly around the hut then through some trees – until she was standing right behind Soloman. She tapped him on the shoulder and said: "So, what are you doing here, may I ask? You wouldn't be spying on me, would you, young man?"

"Oh, no, no, I've been walking around the forest and I stopped to have a rest. Really, that's all I was doing!"

"Oh, yes! So you go for walkies into the heart of this dark forest knowing it will be dusk before you can get back home. Who do you think you're fooling? Do not, whatever you do, take me for a stupid person. Get in my hut at once! You're nothing but a wicked young man. Get in there and don't argue, if you ever want to see your mother again."

"But I don't have a mother," he said, "she's dead."

Gesuelda did not feel sorry for him one bit. So if Soloman was looking to soften her heart, he could stop it at once. That idea would never work with her.

"Dead? What about your father?" she asked.

"He's dead, too. And my grandmother, she's dead..."

"So you're all alone in the world, are you?" Gesuelda said to herself, more than to Soloman. "Just sit down and I'll deal with you later," she said.

Soloman looked around him. The hut was not very big. There was a three-tier bunk-bed in the corner and not much else, except for this big filthy black cauldron in the middle hanging from the roof, some crooked shelves, with dirty jars and bottles and boxes lined up on them, and another box on the floor.

"Come on, boy, sit yourself down and cross your legs," Gesuelda was getting impatient. She made it quite clear that she was boss in the hut.

Soloman did as he was told and looked at the man who was already sitting there, staring at the cauldron. The boy liked adventures in books but not real ones like these, where he was in serious danger. Another sure thing was that he didn't like the look of this man. Soloman was intimidated by him because he was so well dressed. Looking down at himself, in comparison, Soloman felt like a real tramp. But, Soloman didn't seem to have much of a choice. He had to sit there and do what he was told and be part of the strange goings-on in this spooky hut.

What was he to do? Nobody was going to miss him at home. Nobody would come looking for him.

Gesuela knew that just as much as Soloman did.

“So, where was I?” Gesuela said, “Ah! Yes, my recipe book.” She fumbled through a few dirty sheets in a box. “Ah, here it is: The Almighty Smoke Recipe.” She looked at the list and got a few jars and boxes down from the crooked shelves around her.

“A little brook water to boil it all in,” she said as she poured it out of a filthy jar into the cauldron. She called out the ingredients while getting them from different shaped jars and bottles, all dirty and cracked, as she threw them into the cauldron:

“Three eyes of newts.

A third of a rat’s tail.

Seven fleas from my sisters’ hair.

3.7 cubes of a mouldy blackcurrant jelly.

Thirteen stitches from the festered wound of a witch’s leg.

Thirty bristles of a wild pig.”

This took her rather a long time to count out. Judge Ormerod and Soloman looked on hardly believing their eyes and ears. Judge Ormerod, unlike Soloman, was quite happy to go through this. The result would be worth it. These old hags were never wrong. And he would give them all he had if only they’d help him to become the most powerful man in Westshire, and keep his wife quiet as well.

“Three dried seven-legged spiders and seven clippings from my toe nails. That should do the trick,” she said, all pleased with herself.

Her sisters appeared just in time. “Here you are, dear sister,” Gasmina said, “here are the logs you asked for.”

“Perfect,” Gesuela said, complimenting her sisters for once, instead of telling them off.

Placing the logs under the cauldron, Gesuela asked her twin sisters to burp into the cauldron before she set a match to the wood. “Perfect,” said Gesuela, “now just breathe on the wood to kindle the fire up properly.”

The fire was soon raging and the liquid boiled while the three sisters chanted: “Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble” for three minutes and 33 seconds. They spat on the fire to tone it down a little when it flared up.

“Gasmina,” said Gesuela, “go and get the mug. And you,” she said turning to Gismonda, “go and get the big wooden ladle.” Gesuela passed the disgusting liquid to Judge Ormerod, stirring it three-and-a-half times, and saying “Come on, man, drink up. I need to tell you your future.”

Judge Ormerod held his nose and drank it down feeling quite queasy but knowing all along that it was for his own good.

Soloman felt sick just by watching him drinking.

“Right, we can start,” said Gesuela. “Look into the steam rising out of the cauldron and you will see some images of your future while I talk you through it.”

“And you,” she said, turning to Soloman, “you will go outside along with my sisters and wait there

until I have time to deal with you. You horrid little man.”

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