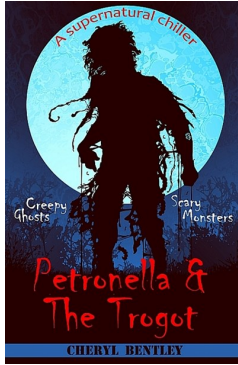


## Petronella & The Trogot



Petronella moves to Charis Cottage hidden in the thick dark woods at the bottom of a track on the outskirts of Fort Willow. Everything is perfect. Except for one thing. Since she moved an enormous black tree has appeared in her back garden in the shape of a giant with a big black circle on the ground under it.

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

Petronella finds out that the hole is a deep pit and is terrified to go near its ridge. But one night...

How is the tree linked to:-

- \* The creepy night-time visits by the Hooded Horseman?
- \* The boy ghost, Percy, Petronella finds in her bed one night?
- \* The invasion of ghosts of the ancient Strincas population all over Fort Willow?

### Reviews

"Kids will like this. Girls will like it for romance and boys will like it for the scare factor." - *Ann Klausing, Bookseller for Books-A-Million*

"This is a cross between fantasy, horror and mythology. It reads like a fairy tale and I liked it.

"Petronella and her cat are living in her cottage and doing well without the other villagers. Being a bit odd, she has a snail garden. And, one day, she notices a big black tree that she can't recall having been there before. She doesn't know it's going to play an important part in her life.

"Her cat is the one that starts it all. He digs up a skull and some bones and takes them home with him. When the villagers find some other bones in the same vicinity, they dig them up, too. They think they've found a missing family and that Petronella is the killer. When the bones come back to life and they find themselves confronted with people who died long, long ago, the villagers get concerned. Especially since the murdered peasants are reclaiming their homes and land...

"The Hooded Horseman (another peasant from the past) visits Petronella and tells her that she is

the chosen one and has a quest to do to help the peasants and right the wrongs of the land and people long dead. Petronella is willing, even if it means visiting the equivalent of hell.

“The author does a nice job of writing a tale that is unique and interesting to read. I couldn’t stop reading until I found out how it all ended. I bet you won’t be able to either.

“Happy reading.” - *Jo Ann Hakola, Bookseller, USA*

“I loved this book. The plot was unique to me and the creatures were amazing, there is no need for illustrations as the description of the characters is so good that they leap into your imagination in picture form.

“This book has mild horror, adventure, and morality which all work so well together. The main character – Petronella – becomes a much loved focus of the book and the change in the village is masterfully worked. Some children may find the old English speech of some of the characters hard to adjust to but I am sure that they will get there in the end. This does make distinction between the modern time people and the ancient characters much easier.

“I would be delighted to read more by this author as I found this book totally enthralling and give it a star rating of 5/5 – I loved it.” - *Adele Symonds, Reviewer, UK*

“This was presented as a supernatural chiller and I must admit...it was a fantastic and unique read for MG and YA readers.

“I do think that the author showed wonderful imagination in creating this world and these characters.” - *Jolene Haley, Librarian, USA*

“Petronella & the Trogot is introduced as a supernatural chiller. People who lived almost 1,200 years ago, members of the Strincas civilization, start appearing and living in modern day Fort Willow. Needless to say the Strincas resurrection scares (off) many modern day citizens. If that were not enough, Bentley adds a hooded horseman (think Legend of Sleepy Hollow) and a black, evil monster tree in Petronella’s back yard.

“In Part 1 one you get to know Petronella ? our protagonist, modern day Fort Willow inhabitants, the Strincas, and the evil Lord Fortesque. In Part 2 Petronella and Percy, a Strinca, investigate the tree and find themselves on a journey. Their journey is similar to Dante’s Inferno with a modern twist...

“Let me put my teacher hat on for a minute...I think this novel would be a good companion to students reading Dante’s Inferno. As much as I enjoy the Inferno, a lot of time must be spent on background information. Who are all these people in Dante’s hell? What did they do? Why did he punish them in this particular way? In Petronella & the Trogot, you know who all the offenders are. I enjoyed reading the novel.” - *Rebecca Wallace, Educator, USA*

“I enjoyed reading Petronella & The Trogot; it was a chilling tale however I wasn’t fully hooked until the second part... I would liken the second part, Petronella’s journey into hell and investigation of an evil, monstrous tree in her backyard to a miniature version of Dante’s Inferno. Because Dante’s The Divine Comedy especially The Inferno is one of my favorite pieces of literature I was hooked immediately. It was almost in the same structure as the inferno as well with various ‘sinners’ having punishments that put a cruel twist on their crime. I also really liked Bentley’s creative use of language, some of the characters, ex. Strincas, had a cool old-Englishy way of speaking.

“So overall this is a good read that I recommend especially for those who have a fond spot for The Inferno. It has spooky creatures, adventure, and some romance.” - *Patrice Caldwell, Reviewer, USA*

“Petronella and The Trogot is a slightly creepy, and enchanting book. Cheryl Bentley created this very interesting and original storyline for this book. This book is a twist between supernatural and urban fantasy.

“The people of Fort Willow hate Petronella, who is slightly green, walks around bare foot, and her house is in front of a giant mysterious tree. One day Petronella’s cat digs up a skull, and that day will change Fort Willow forever. After the cat digs up the skull then the skull’s torso it brings to Petronella’s house, it brings the ghost of the Hooded Horseman. In the field where the cat dug up the skull torso, more skeletons were found and every skeleton put back together brought that person back to life. These people are the Ancient Strincas, and Petronella is the Chosen One who decides what happens to them.

“Petronella was a fun and interesting person to read about. She was really loving and caring. Yes, she has a rough outside but on the inside she is a generally caring person. The Strincas were really interesting and fun to read about also...

“For me this book was not that scary, it was thrillingly fun to read. The storyline grabs you and traps you in it for an action packed ride.

“I really liked this book. Cheryl Bentley did a beautiful job on this book. Petronella and The Trogot is a riveting and action packed novel. I recommend this book for any one looking for a thrilling but fun read.” - *Brittan Hardy, Reviewer*

“Petronella, a woman who is described as ugly, moves into a village, Fort Willow. But all is not well ? Strincas, the village’s inhabitants from thousands of years ago are waking up and moving in to the village and a hooded horseman tells Petronella she is the chosen one, the one that will rescue his people from the Trogot, a large tree in her garden that leads into a sort of hell/eternal punishment. Petronella, and a strincas boy Percy have to navigate their way through the Trogot to save the Strincas...

“I did enjoy Part 2 of the book... It was soon revealed that the Strincas were brutally murdered by the Lord of the Manor when a thief hit his wife’s head. The hooded horseman gives Petronella a device that is able to control the Strincas and a black box that will save her but only seven times. He also tells her she is the chosen one, although he doesn’t explain what that means. Now we come to the titular Trogot, the massive black tree in Petronella’s garden, which is a gate to hell. Petronella and Percy (a Strincas boy that used to live in Petronella’s house) venture into the Trogot to look for Percy’s parents, who have been trapped there.

“I have to say, the Trogot journey was my favourite bit of the book. The ideas of punishment and the way that Cheryl Bentley presented the punishment and the guardians were very interesting ideas ? I just wish they were a little more developed.

“...I did find myself chuckling at some of the funnier lines.” - *Laura Noakes, Reviewer, UK*

“Full of ghosts and ghoulies, this is an imaginative tale.” - *Bertrams Book Wholesalers*

## **Excerpt**

### **Chapter 1**

Petronella Chewnik had just moved to the outskirts of a pretty little village in the middle of the rolling downs of Westshire. She had bought a thatched cottage in Westshire’s thick dark woods hidden at the bottom of a woodland track. It was simply the most lovely place that anyone could ever live in. Except for one thing. Behind the cottage stood an enormous black tree. It towered above all the others in the woods. When she’d bought Charis Cottage, she hadn’t noticed this

monster of a tree. The thought that the tree had appeared after she'd moved in kept racing round in her mind.

But how could a huge beast like that have grown in such a short space of time?

She knew it was silly. She must be seeing things. But that black tree just looked so much like a hairy giant – one with thick branches, growing downwards towards the ground, looking like drooping arms. The trunk split in two at the bottom, like two sturdy legs. The treetop was in the shape of a wild head of straggly hair.

Black leaves grew on the black branches. And, when it rained, black water dripped down and had formed a big circle on the ground around the tree. It was so black that Petronella thought it must be a hole – like a well – deep and dark. And the tree stood right in the middle of this pit. There must be an edge there, somewhere. If she stood near that ridge and lost her balance she would surely fall into the well and never be seen again. No, she would never go near it. Not in a million years. If she didn't go to the tree, it wouldn't come to her, would it?

'Get yourself together,' she told herself. 'Loneliness can do strange things to people's minds. When you haven't got anyone to talk to, you think too much.' Her cat, Maalox, was her only company. A VERY big black tomcat with shiny green eyes that glowed in the dark, and a strange white patch on its breast, in the shape of a shield. He had come with Charis Cottage. Already behind her front door mewing his head off on the wind-swept night she'd moved in. He had a name-plate tied to his neck: Maalox. No address, no owner's name. Being a kind soul, she let him stay. Sometimes she spoke to him. But it was mostly her and her thoughts. Thoughts that sometimes got very weird indeed.

At last, she believed she'd found some peace. She'd been forced to move from one place to another, time and again, by cruel remarks shouted at her in the streets. These were usually about how ugly or weird she was. And nasty boys and girls played tricks on her out of spite. This hidden cottage, away from all the horrible people she'd known, was perfect.

As far as looks went, she was not exactly a front-cover face for a glossy fashion magazine. A strange health condition didn't help. Her liver did not work properly and this coloured her skin a light shade of green. Her nose was on the big side, with a hump in it about half-way down. Her teeth were uneven and yellowish. One of them had grown a bit outwards and upwards so it could still be seen when she closed her mouth.

When she went out she usually wore a black hat, thrown at her by a someone who'd said it would suit her because she looked like a witch. She would push her long black hair up into this hat to look neat.

But she did have beautiful brilliant-blue and lively eyes.

## **Chapter 2**

Summer had soon come around and Petronella decided to go to Fort Willow's village ball. She knew that, as usual, when she went to parties she would sit on her own. What a lonely soul. She had to make the effort, though, because she hadn't given up looking for a husband. And this summer party was a brilliant chance. More than anything in the world she wanted a child. A little boy or girl to love and look after. But no man would marry her. Stop daydreaming, Petronella, it'll never happen.

In Fort Willow, all the lamp-posts had been decorated with coloured balloons for this big event. Pretty red and green party lights had been hung up by shopkeepers along the main roads leading to the white pavilion marquee, creating an exciting atmosphere. And, at the entrance of the marquee were festoons and sprays of roses.

Petronella was getting herself ready for that special evening when she would meet the people of Fort Willow for the first time after hiding away in the woods so long. She powdered her face and carefully outlined her lips with bright green lipstick. Then she bent over to pull on her best army camouflage boots with steel safety toes. Usually, she went barefoot, but for parties she always wore her army boots. She threw her silver glittery shawl over her shoulders: now she was ready to go. Through the woods she stomped, then down the High Street to the field. This field, like many others around the village, belonged to the self-important pudding-faced and pot-bellied Farmer Giles, the Mayor of Fort Willow.

Petronella hadn't noticed that Maalox had been following her all along. So big he was that, from a distance, some people mistook him for a small dog. A group of boys along the roadside started throwing stones at Maalox. The cat ran towards them, snarled at them and showed them his sharp claws. The more the boys looked at Maalox, the bigger he seemed to get. His body just swelled out. The boys were frightened out of their tiny little minds, quickly back tracked and took to the hills as fast as they could. Petronella recognised her cat's screeches anywhere. Twisting around, she shouted: "Maalox, go straight home and don't let me tell you that again!"

But Maalox had a mind of his own, thank you very much. Rolling his eyes downwards, in pretend obedience, he started walking in the other direction and made out he was going back home, but when Petronella wasn't looking anymore, he hid in the grocer's doorway. There he stayed until she was well out of sight, then Maalox made his way to the marquee, too.

Outside the marquee many cats of Fort Willow were gathering. Probably in search of scraps of food. Maalox had a soft spot for Belinda. The prettiest of the female cats in the village. When Maalox saw her, she was proudly striding up and down a narrow wall holding her tail straight up high. She glanced at Maalox, then turned her snobbish little head in the other direction. She wasn't going to have anything to do with him. Maalox was so disappointed that he found a space near the marquee and started clawing up the earth as fast as he could out of rage. Soon there was a little pile of soil next to the hole he'd dug up. He clawed some more, but his paw scratched against something hard. It was a smooth round object. Like a football. But as he dug more and more around it, it became clear that it was definitely not a ball. It was a skull! Yes, a human head. Maalox gripped the jaw of the skull between his teeth and ran off home with it. Not knowing what to do with his find, he dropped it in the coal scuttle next to the fireplace in the living-room. It could stay there until he worked out what to do with it.

In the meantime, Petronella had made her entrance at the summer ball. The villagers all sniggered behind her back. Both men and women were whispering nasty remarks about her. Petronella ate a couple of cupcakes at the tea stall. Then she went up to the first single man she saw, Mr Pomshort, the local butcher, and asked: "Will you marry me?" The man had just slurped up a mouthful of beer and spurted it out all over her shawl in laughter. "You're joking, woman!" he said, "I'd rather live on a desert island on my own all my life than marry you." Then he started laughing so much that he had to hold on to his belly, wobbling about like a jelly all over the place.

Not being one to be easily put off, Petronella went to Farmer Giles and tried the same question on him: "Not until a black tree gobbles you up," he answered. How strange that he knew about the black tree. Was it the same one as hers?

Petronella suddenly let off a terribly high-pitched shriek. "I damn the lot of you," she shouted. Then she threw herself into the dance she knew best: the Bosa Nova. First her face twitched, then she started shaking her shoulders; and throwing her arms up and down all over the place while she hopped from side to side. What a clumsy show. After that, everyone in Fort Willow giggled about Petronella's dancing for weeks. Twitching around, whenever they saw her in the street, and creasing themselves in half from laughter when they were taking her off.

Petronella decided she'd stay away from them all as much as she could – nasty chicken-brained

little villagers.

### Chapter 3

A lot of people who have lived on their own for a long time develop some pretty weird habits.

Petronella was one of those. Her hobby was hunting out snails. Other people may like putting stamps in an album but Petronella got fun out of collecting snails. She popped them in the bunker she'd make at the bottom of her garden. Along the hedgerow she had sectioned off an area and filled it with soil which she kept nice and moist by watering it every day. She visited her snails two or three times a day to see if they were OK. Snails like coming out at night, when the soil is dark and moist. When it rained, Petronella would go out snail hunting and add to her collection. She would tread the soil barefoot in the moonlight to the sound of owls, finding snails under rocks and stuck to logs and smooth stones. She loved their slippery pale skin and the different patterns on their shells.

No human voices to spoil the pitter-patter on the quiet woods. She enjoyed watching the wet shades of green in the distance, and the fresh rain fall on everything: on the pine trees, on the ivy, on logs, on the little lake, and on her face and arms. Raindrops snaked down her skin in the same way they did off the leaves on the trees. She didn't mind that it muddied her long black skirt. It rained on her thoughts, making her feel like a real child of nature in the sad beauty that was all around her. One night while she was doing cartwheels in the woods, she heard an eerie rustling noise and thudding of horse's hooves. She hid behind a thick tree trunk. But the horseman had seen her from a long way off and stopped. His face was hidden in a deep black hood. No way could she see who he was. In his hand, he had an old yellowy-brown note which he held out for Petronella to take. Trembling with fear, she quickly crumpled it into her pocket, and hurried back to Charis Cottage. Once she was inside and safe, she ironed out the note on the table with her hands, then looked for her glasses. She could not make it out. She tried turning the piece of paper around. When she held the note up straight, the scribble looked like the letters TCO. What did this mean?

Drawing back her net curtains a little, she found the courage to peep out into the darkness. It looked like he wasn't around. There was no more noise. Questions started spinning round in her head: What could these letters mean? Who was that man? Why had he given the note to her of all people? What was she supposed to do? She could do nothing there and then. Off to bed she went, to sleep on it. Maybe the answers would come to her the next day when she could think straight.

### Chapter 4

Maalox woke up very early that particular morning. His sleeping place was on a broken armchair next to Petronella's bed. When he wanted to wake her up, he sat on her head. But, not this morning. He gave himself a quick lick clean, darted to his saucer of milk under the spiral staircase, then went to the coal scuttle to see if the skull was still there. Yes, it was! Maalox pushed the cat-flap outwards with the top of his head, jumped out and headed towards the village in long strides. There was no traffic in the High Street except for Fred the milkman on his rounds. Mrs Bellamy, at house number 49, was already nosing behind the net curtains of her front-room window, in her dressing-gown.

Fred crept up the garden path to Mrs Bellamy's brass milk rack. He tried to deliver her milk without being seen. If she started nattering, she'd go on and on forever. Headache. But the house-proud gossip had already opened her newly-painted white door to ask Fred if he could leave a carton of fresh orange juice and a pound of butter as well as the usual milk. Her husband was the village constable and he needed a hearty breakfast before he went off on the beat. She always got breakfast ready for him with joy because she loved to get him out of the house and have the place to herself.

"No prob, Mrs B," said Fred.

"Did you see that ugly witch prancing about at the vill-age ball? God only knows what she gets up to in that cottage of hers, in the woods there where no-one can see her. I wouldn't be surprised if she's brewing up potions and put-ting spells on us. Mark my words, they'll be trouble round here before long. This village isn't what it used to be."

At this time in the morning, Fred just couldn't stomach Mrs Bellamy's natter. So, as she was talking, he started creeping backwards towards his float, while nodding to her all the time. As he was doing this, Mrs Bellamy spotted Maalox sneaking by on the pavement across the road. "And he's up to no good either," she shouted after Fred as he'd just got into the driver's seat for the great escape.

The bacon, eggs and sausages were already sizzling in the pan when her husband came downstairs. She was still obsessing about Maalox: "That woman's cat was prowling about this morning, looking as if he was up to no good."

"I wouldn't worry about it, dear," the Constable said, "it's only normal for cats to be out early." "Not for that cat to be in the village, it isn't! He's up to no good, I tell you. You mark my words." Constable Bellamy munched his last piece of toast, washed it down with a cup of tea then flew out of the front door, saying he'd be late for work, if he didn't hurry.

While plodding to the Police Station, he saw Maalox going into Farmer Giles's field. The cat disappeared round the back of the marquee. When Maalox thought nobody could see him, he clawed into the brown peat in the same spot as the night before. He soon came across a neck and shoulders, and dug carefully around them to free them of the soil stuck to the bones. The torso was now completely dug up. It must have been the second part of the skeleton whose head was in the coal scuttle. The weight of these bones was too much for Maalox to carry. He went into the marquee. In the corner, near a cluttered table, was a food trolley. If Maalox got the torso into the marquee and onto the trolley, he could wheel it home. It was still early, and even the milkman had gone off to another part of the village. By turning the torso round and round and moving it forward little by little, Maalox managed to get it into the marquee. When he had pulled it up onto the lower-shelf of the trolley, he threw a table cloth over the whole lot, and pushed it back home, gripping the trolley handle in his mouth.

Maalox wheeled the bones to the snail bunker. The snails were busy feeding on leaves. He cleared them out of the way with his front paws. The torso was soon buried and the trolley hidden under some shrubs nearby. Probably, thinking that he had done a good morning's work, Maalox went to lie on the mat in the front-door porch. The rattling of milk bottles growing louder told Maalox that Fred was bringing their milk.

Fred wagged his finger at Maalox, saying: "You wanna watch it. Don't go getting yourself into any trouble, mate. That's all I can say. Belinda's not your kind, my boy. You know Blazh, that vicious stray, likes her, as well. He'll have your whiskers for garters, if you ain't careful." And with that, the milkman went off back to his rounds.

Petronella was getting up. Hadn't got a wink of sleep, tossing and turning in her bed all night. Her mind buzzing with that strange meeting she'd had the night before. Still had no idea what those letters stood for. Maalox jumped onto Petronella's bed and snuggled up against her: "Maalox, you are such a star," she said, as she stroked his head. She might as well get on with her everyday chores – yet the sight of the black-hooded horseman kept haunting her mind. And then there was that black monster of a tree in her back garden. She knew the branches were never in the same place. The wind couldn't sway that strong thick wood.

The best view of that beast was from the spare bedroom window. The room where she'd piled up all the boxes, full of useless objects, when she'd moved. She didn't know why, but couldn't stop

herself. She had to go and see it. So she climbed the creaking stairs, then stopped on the landing for a moment. Yes, she would go in.

Creeping into the spare room she watched from a distance, as if she was afraid of being seen by the tree. She was sure its head had turned to face Charis Cottage and that it was looking straight at her. She dropped down quickly and hid behind one of the boxes. The tree's head seemed to have stretched out towards her, as if to get a better look at her. Two branches lifted out in front of it, like arms. Its hands turned inwards. Then its hands moved towards its chest, as if to say "Come to me." There it stayed in that position for quite a while. Before dropping its arms down again.

When Petronella was sure it wouldn't move anymore, still keeping her head down, she made for the door. Once she was out on the landing, she locked up the room. She promised herself she would never go in there again. Never.

Back to her housework she went. Dusting, polishing and tidying up. She had to busy herself to keep her mind off the mysterious secrets of Charis Cottage and its woods.

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