

*Chessie Bligh
And the
Scroll of Andelthor*

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THE HEIR TO ANDELTHOR – CHAPTER 1

A world's struggle to exist is never pretty, and when you are only fourteen years old, and that world depends on you to save the day ... well, chances are that's not pretty either. Such a struggle is especially perilous if you are not aware of the magical forces about to be unleashed—forces you don't yet understand.

Chessie Bligh was that fourteen-year-old. She lived an unremarkable life—just a youngster with a dim collection of vague childhood memories. She didn't know she stood at the precipice of an unfettered dreamworld. Her ordinary life was about to be swallowed up and transformed into the stuff of legends.

Chessie Bligh had no idea who she was or the danger that awaited her. If she had known, she might never have left the safety of her bedroom, where she so often sought refuge. Her bedroom was the same place where her controlling and unloving human parents imprisoned her ... but it was also where Chessie tended her thoughtful garden of cherished books. Books she'd hidden under the bed. Books worth reading again and again. Books that fired her imagination and let her become the story's characters, slipping into their worlds and disappearing to faraway places.

Chessie was about to tumble into the world of elves. And elves are keepers of secrets ... long-held secrets. Chessie knew nothing about these secrets or even about elves themselves—those who kept the secret of her heritage. When she looked in the mirror, she saw a fourteen-year-old nobody, not the firstborn direct descendant of Andel and Thora, rulers of the elf kingdom. Her elf protectors hid her in the human world, with a human family. She lived a secluded life in San Francisco, California, with rich human parents, her private-school classmates, nannies, and her best friend Wuggbert, a Shih Tzu puppy. All of that was about to change.

This change was brought about by the discovery of a scroll in a long-lost tomb in the Grand Canyon—the last place anyone expected to find an elf tomb. Long ago stories about these ancients had been well-known, but with the passage of time, all knowledge of them was lost. The tales faded into myth and legend.

The lost history had told of two elf worlds; one existed in another dimension, known as Antèlantiësse, and one existed in this dimension—the earth dimension, where humans dwell. Uncertainty in Antèlantiësse had caused the elf exodus to earth, for in that land, a civil war raged. The war, started by a race of half-elf, half-human creatures known as the FinVarra. This war had been fought for thousands of years.

The first, and—up until fourteen years ago—the only exodus of elves from Antèlantiësse occurred in 2250 BC. A wizard elf named Elwë, along with his wife and a dozen or so others, escaped the FinVarras' wrath. Rather than settling in one place, they scattered throughout the human world. Over time tales of their flight faded into dim memory ... but these tales were reborn with the discovery of the tomb.

Ptolmey Zant was credited with the find. Ptolmey, an elf, a Theosophist, and lover of human Egyptology, rediscovered the ancient legend on an ancient Egyptian stone tablet. Theosophy is the comparative study of religion and ancient philosophy.

Inside the tomb lay the remains of Elwë. Beside him were ancient elf artifacts. The tomb's walls were covered in runes that explained why Elwë had made his long-forgotten journey from Antèlantiësse to the human world. But the runes did not explain how. For Ptolmey

and the other elves who'd grown up in the human world, "How?" was the question they'd been seeking to answer for fourteen years.

They were so keen to learn this because, fourteen years before, it had happened again. For a second time, elves passed through the veil of space and time: twelve infant younglings. And on one of the infant's blankets was pinned the message "Orphans of war."

Unfortunately the younglings' arrival could not have come at a worse time. A new threat loomed on earth: murder. Never before had an elf taken another elf's life. The cause—and the culprit—remained a mystery. With the use of black magic, he or she had killed two of the newly arrived younglings and two Die Sterntaler leaders. Die Sterntaler, the one and only elf stronghold, was located at the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. There, with an unknown killer in their midst, the elf rulers decided to place the younglings with human Watchers, hoping to hide the younglings' true identities within a sea of humans.

For fourteen years, the younglings remained safe ... until rumors of the tomb surfaced and could not be squelched. Nor could rumors of the prophecy—a prophecy and a danger pointed directly at the heir of Andelthor. That heir's name was Chessie, one of the orphan younglings. The cancer of greed soon turned the hearts of man and elf. Their treachery and viciousness, which compared to that of bloodthirsty pirates, thrived until it consumed their every waking moment.

* * * * *

Chessie remained ignorant of these unfolding events as the story began without her. Sterntaler, a fortress made out of stone blocks, was shrouded in enchantments and thus invisible to humans. Nestled beside it was the tiny village of El-Lisht. Throughout the human world, there existed small elf enclaves and home sites. El-Lisht was the largest; fifty-eight elves lived there. The other sites scattered throughout the world were home to ten or fewer members. Sadly, the elves would not have been out of place on the endangered-species list. A quiet but proud race, they cared not a whit for humans, whom they deemed uncaring, clumsy, stupid, and loud. The elves couldn't forgive the humans' gluttonous squandering of resources. Wild animals, water, air—humans cared little for their irretrievable loss. The elves trusted but a few of them: those humans known only as the Watchers.

Elves were extremely handsome folk with their blond hair, blue eyes, a small mound of a nose ... and, of course, pointy ears. The women stood about five and a half feet tall, while the men grew to six feet. Bonds between the males and females were strong, and they mated for life. As lovers of nature, elves rarely bore offspring; for them, less truly was more. When they did bear a youngling, it was nurtured with the utmost love, care, and devotion.

The elves were extremely fond of seclusion and privacy. Their mental and physical abilities far exceeded those of a human. Elves could outrun a deer and jump higher than a cat. Their eyesight was as acute as a hawk's, and their hearing even keener than an owl's. Elves were so agile, they could disappear within a blink of an eye.

Sterntaler elves, like their counterparts in Antèlantiësse, had studied magic for as long as anyone could remember. Each was a wizard elf who possessed a certain set of unique skills. Just as some humans can sing while others barely managed a monotone, Sterntaler elves could perform impossible feats in the art of magic that other elves could not. A very rare few, known as the Celebornes, were born with innate knowledge. They could sense the future, read and speak forgotten languages, and perform feats of supernatural power.

Most elves lived in a peace-loving culture and would never think to abuse their powers. The spirit of kindness existed among them, an unbroken bond woven into their moral fabric. With magic spells and crystal balls, they kept in close contact. Like family, they protected each other, for better or worse.

For the most part, the elves kept to themselves ... though occasionally tongues tended to wag. No one had a more attentive audience than Marge Grimsneed. She helped fuel the stories about the tomb and Chessie. Talk of the youngling and the scroll spread like wildfire; indeed, Marge's name gave credence to the stories, because she was one of the scroll's translators. She was an exceptional wizard elf—although, looking at her, you'd never come to that conclusion. She and her friend Penelope Waxworth were able to interpret pieces of the newly discovered scroll, which was written in an ancient elf language few could begin to decipher. Nevertheless Penelope and Marge were the best translators the elf realm had ever known. This ability, in fact, had set them apart as exceptional elves. While these two wizard elves knew all about Chessie—an integral part of their study—Chessie had yet to learn about them.

The two women had been friends for years and lived in an old southern plantation in Virginia called Winklebourne. At times their feisty chatter resounded off the old plaster walls.

Neither woman was very attractive. Marge was a lover of chocolates and had a weight problem. Penelope, on the other hand, was skinny as a sapling—and she had homely oversized ears. She resembled a goat. But what these two lacked in looks, they made up for with intelligence. And they worked tirelessly to decipher the scroll. In it they hoped to discover a window to both their pasts and their futures.

After a long day of standing hunched over the scroll, Penelope and Marge took a much-needed break. Evening was descending. Marge relaxed contently on the sofa, while Penelope, who had a curious and nervous nature, tried to use the newly acquired bubble wand. It was another important artifact that had surfaced from the tomb.

Penelope dug through the contents of the window seat like an obsessed paleontologist looking for rare dinosaur bones. Her contorted body was bent like a folded-up pocketknife, and all Marge could see was fanny and ankles.

“Aha!” Penelope snapped upright. She grasped the wand, eyeing it. “Found it! Hmmm ... What would you like me to do?”

Marge gave a stern look. “So there's the point, isn't it? Clean up the mess you just made digging around looking for that thing!” She brushed chocolate crumbs from her lap and whisked them into her pocket.

Penelope, meanwhile, cast her spell: “Fast-idious spic span-ious.” The end of the wand erupted in bubbles: pink ones, transparent ones, blue ones. The colored bubbles complied with her orders to clean. Unfortunately the wand had interpreted Penelope's words as a command to scour and bleach, not tidy up clutter. Popping all over the drawing room, the bubbles turned the carpet from blue to snowy white, bleached the tweed pattern out of the drapes, and made the dark blue sofa look like bales of white cotton.

Marge craned her neck to see where the bubbles would strike next. She tensed as the bubbles floated straight at her. They ignored her curly white hair and went straight for the powder and rouge. Her makeup was callously scoured off. The bubbles left her blue eyes peering from her pasty white face. Her pink sweater, cotton dress with its pattern of pink flower bouquets, and pink socks had turned the color of a Halloween ghost.

She shrieked, “Good heavens! Look what you've done!”

Penelope blanched, raised her wand, and commanded, “Suspendere Desperatus!” The bubbles stopped spewing out the end of the magic wand.

Hysterically Marge shouted, “Oh, I could just shoot you! You had to throw in that spell, didn’t you? Waving the darn thing just wasn’t enough!” She shook her head, gazing down at her outfit.

“I guess I need to read the owner’s manual more carefully,” Penelope admitted.

“Oh, look at my new outfit ... Ruined! Ruined! Ruined!” Marge scolded as she tried to smooth wrinkles from her sad-looking clothes.

“White seems to be your color,” Penelope said with a shrug.

Marge glowered at her and pointed an angry finger. “I told you that wand is a storm in the making! Find the directions for that stupid thing before you go and use it again!”

Penelope shot her a quick, tight smile.

It was common knowledge that Marge could be one of the crankiest elves in the realm ... a truth that the long-suffering Penelope observed on a daily basis. She gave Marge a wide-eyed look and stuffed the wand into a pocket. With half the wand exposed ... its magic not quite finished ... it spewed one last bubble, which erupted with a loud pop.

This caused Marge to jump. Her eyes narrowed, and Penelope didn’t have to ask why her friend was so displeased. The entire elf community found quiet amusement in Marge’s tendency to wear matching colors with her identical twin sister, Mabel. Both were a bit quirky and prided themselves on their colorful fashion sense. Both shared a psychic bond. And both were plump, chocolate-eating elves. Mabel, a librarian, lived at Die Sterntaler, that enchanted place, hidden by elf spells from prying human eyes.

Trying to smooth over the magic disaster, Penelope glanced out the window, chortled, and remarked, “Oh, look! There goes William. Bet he’s heading for home.”

William Pertle was Winklebourne’s human caretaker. He was finishing work for the day. An old-timer whose only outfit seemed to be a red plaid flannel shirt and blue overalls, William had silvery hair and wore a perpetual wan smile that made his soft blue eyes twinkle. He lived in the snug little cottage near the plot of roses. For generations the Pertle family had taken care of Winklebourne. The pre-Civil War homestead featured a white pillared mansion approached by a circular driveway. Surrounding the Virginia mansion were manicured lawns, trimmed shrubbery, and exotic flower gardens.

Penelope waved and gave a vigorous nod.

Marge looked at her watch and commented, “Goodness! It’s getting late. It’s almost time for supper. Soup sounds tasty to me. How about you?”

“Soup will be just fine,” Penelope said. She turned and joined Marge as they headed for the kitchen. Suddenly there was a knock at the front door.

“Who could that possibly be?” Penelope asked.

“Probably William, coming to ask if we need anything before he burrows in for the night.”

They walked toward the front door. Penelope looked through the keyhole but could not see anyone. “Who’s there?” She cocked her head closer to the door.

“Ga ... gadget lady!” the male voice replied, trying to sound like a woman.

All the elves knew Penelope had too many gadgets. Her bubble wand was a perfect example.

Marge whispered, “Penelope, that voice sounds suspicious. Go into the drawing room. Look through the window and see who it is.” Marge paused and sniffed. “What’s that sickeningly sweet smell?”

In a hurried glimpse, Penelope spotted the stranger’s shopping bag, which brimmed with gadgets. She scampered back to the foyer and eagerly said, “I’m sure she is selling exactly what I need! And perhaps she’s selling some exotic fragrance.”

The whiny voice on the other side of the door said, “Excuse me, miss, but the wind is ripping my bag. I would like to head for home. You are my last stop. I realize it’s getting late ... would you care to look?”

Penelope couldn’t contain her exuberance and in an anxious whisper said, “Gadgets!”

Marge cautioned, “Put the chain lock on before you open the door.”

“Right!” And with a flourish, Penelope did just that.

Whether it was a combination of wind and brute force, or just magic, some sort of lightning bolt snapped the sturdy chain like a frayed shoelace and thrust the door wide open. Penelope and Marge barely had time to jump out of the way. A dark, ghostly figure stepped inside. A banshee wind whipped the hooded figure’s cloak as it advanced toward them. Penelope and Marge stumbled backward, terrified.

The gale-force wind cleared the air of the thick and oily odor—what had smelled like a rotting flower. Too late Penelope and Marge realized the scent had been dragonsbane, the sixth sense-dulling herb. The rarely seen, rarely used form of black magic had clouded their judgment. Now, in fear, the two friends turned to run. Two meaty hands grabbed their collars, jerked them back, and lifted them off the ground.

Fear engaged their elf-wizard instincts. In a simultaneous maneuver, the two women shapeshifted into a snapping black Labrador and a spitting yellow cat. Claws and paws and hisses and growls overwhelmed the intruder. The black dog lunged and bit an ankle, while the yellow cat scratched and hissed atop the twirling intruder’s head.

The advantage was short-lived. The intruder shapeshifted and shrunk down into a tiny mouse, escaping in search of the nearest hidey-hole.

“A dog? Is that the best you could do?” Marge asked. Her kitty face scrunched up, and her kitty paws formed fists at her waist.

“Oh! And I suppose your worthless impersonation of a cat should make me proud to be in the Elfin Guild!” Penelope hurled back. She paused. “I have to wonder why this evil adversary would choose to play cat and mouse with us. What is it after? And where did it get dragonsbane? That plant hasn’t been seen or used since the Dark Ages! I thought it was extinct, as did everyone else. This must be an elf wizard. But who?” She gasped and added, “You don’t suppose this is the elf who killed the two younglings and our beloved elf leaders?”

“Oh, no!” Marge exclaimed.

Penelope said in a dark tone, “Come on. We must capture that mouse and get to the bottom of this!”

Marge, still in the form of an agile yellow cat, raced after Penelope, the black Lab. Using her doggy nose’s keen sense of smell, Penelope tracked the quarry to a hole behind the sofa. Within moments Marge extended a kitty paw inside, grasping air. Seconds later Marge felt a sudden stabbing pain and quickly retracted her paw. Sitting upright, she licked her pads, but the pain only grew more intense. Her gaze went from her paw to the rodent’s burrow. A short, black snake slithered from the entrance. Marge recognized it as a poisonous asp.

Calculating the danger, Marge transformed into something larger to slow the poison; she became a bear. Penelope expanded and grew light brown fur and a mane, completing her transformation into a lion. The two huge, angry carnivores stalked their prey. The snake withdrew, flicking its wicked tongue.

“That nasty thing bit me. Catch it!” Marge ordered.

“You catch it! One more bite isn’t going to make any difference, is it?” Penelope replied.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake! You’re about as dependable as a tent in a hurricane,” Marge scolded. Her hulking bear body took another lumbering step toward the retreating deadly snake. Penelope the lion roared. The asp turned and stood its ground as its tongue protruded between its fangs, hissing a warning.

“Who are you?” Marge asked. “We know you’re some sort of elf wizard ... but who?”

The dreaded intruder didn’t answer. It kept the heinous color, shapeshifting into a thick pool of tar. Like the LaBrea tar pits that trapped innocent woolly mammoths, the oozing goo surrounded the lion and the bear.

The women started sinking into the sticky bog. Exhausted from the shapeshifting, both returned to their elf forms. Their disappearance ceased when the intruder morphed back into the brown-robed figure. As the women sat panting on the floor, tar dripped from their hair and noses. The dangerous intruder loomed above them.

“Oh, Marge, we’re doomed!”

“Silence!” the intruder’s powerful bass voice boomed. The ominous and foreboding warning sent a shiver down the women’s spines. “You two are going to tell me where the scroll is.”

“What scroll?” Marge asked, her voice shaking.

“Get up!” the intruder yelled.

Fearful, the women scrambled to their feet.

“The scroll ... where is it? No more stalling. This is your last warning!”

If the women had been given enough time, they could have lit a signal bonfire that could be viewed from deep space. Or they could have pressed the magic silent alarm, which could be responded to in five minutes. Both were mentally flogging themselves for their shortsightedness.

“Really, sir,” Marge said, “there are lots of scrolls. Is there one in particular that you are interested in?”

The intruder backhanded her across the face. It contorted, and her lip bled.

“Oh, please!” cried Penelope. “Pl-please don’t hurt her. She doesn’t know!”

Before she could wince, Penelope also suffered the lash of a hand against her cheek.

Marge whimpered and said, “Stop! I sent the scroll to my sister Mabel at Die Sterntaler. Penelope doesn’t know anything. Don’t hurt her!”

Suddenly, from off in the distance, William the caretaker yelled, “Penelope? Marge? What’s going on in there?”

The intruder grew nervous. With a fearful edge to his voice, he said, “Master will kill me!” As a diversionary tactic, he raised his arms and hurled blue balls of flame, igniting the nearby drapes.

Penelope and Marge looked on in horror as their beautiful home began to go up in flames.

“WHERE IS IT?” he bellowed, his eyes shifting back and forth from the women to the open door.

“I tell you, it’s not here!” Marge angrily replied.

“You’d see the scroll destroyed?” the intruder asked, drawing his face mere inches away from Marge’s. “I don’t think so. You’ve tucked it away in a safe place.” He gave her a knowing look.

Her eyes narrowed. She didn’t reply.

“Very well!” he finished. In anger he raised his arms, levitating the women toward the twenty-foot ceiling.

Eyes wide, they awaited their doom. Marge grabbed Penelope’s hand and gave it a squeeze.

Penelope whimpered, “Oh, Marge! I’m afraid.”

“Easy, dear. William will tell Niles and my sister Mabel. We’ll get out of this and find out which elf has turned. Be brave! He won’t kill us; he needs us to translate the scroll.”

But deep down, Marge wasn’t convinced. Her only hope was to hastily cast an added protection spell to ward off the asp’s poison and protect them from a death spell. A shower of purple sparks swirled around them.

The vicious intruder let his arms fall. The two women crashed to the floor. They landed in a lifeless heap, their faces affixed with a blank stare. His icy voice boomed, “Now you two will understand a boring eternity!” Cackling laughter erupted as he raised his arms, palms outstretched. Blue balls of energy shot from his hands and hit the two limp figures on the floor. In the blink of an eye, Marge’s plump form and Penelope’s beanpole physique were frozen into marble statues. The cold, hard creatures had the faces of elves, the bodies of lions, and the wings of eagles.

Again William yelled. “Marge! Penelope! I’m coming!”

The vile intruder hurled another blue ball of flame at the study’s north wall. Then he reached inside a pocket of his robe and pulled out a magic wand. Swirling it above his head, he intoned some sort of spell and soon vanished.

Within minutes the two-hundred-year-old mansion was aflame.

