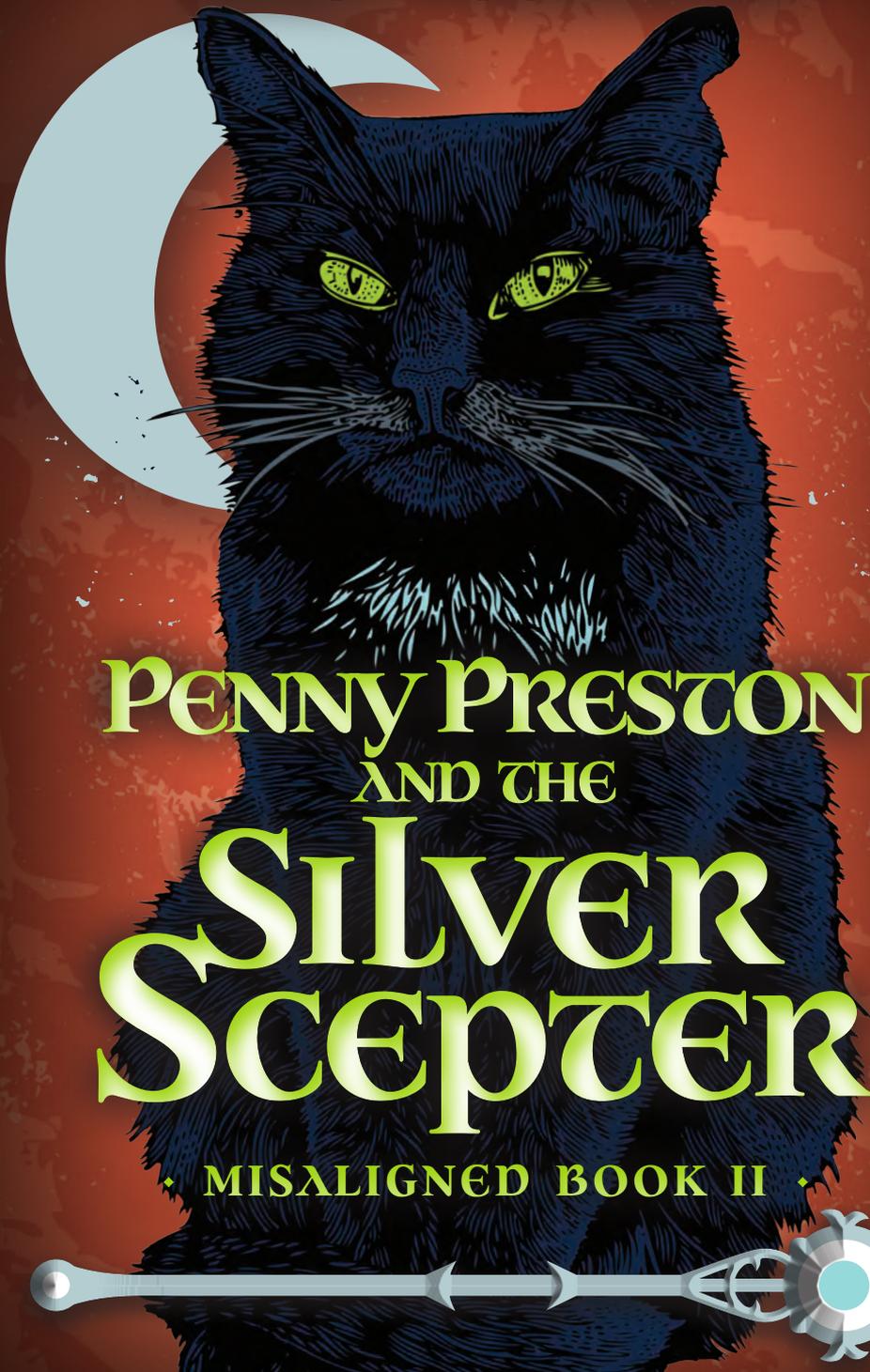
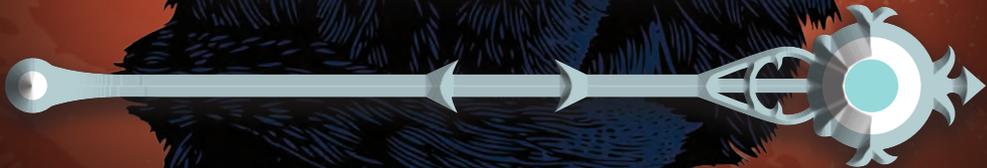


ARMEN POGHARIAN



PENNY PRESTON
AND THE
SILVER
SCEPTER

♦ MISALIGNED BOOK II ♦



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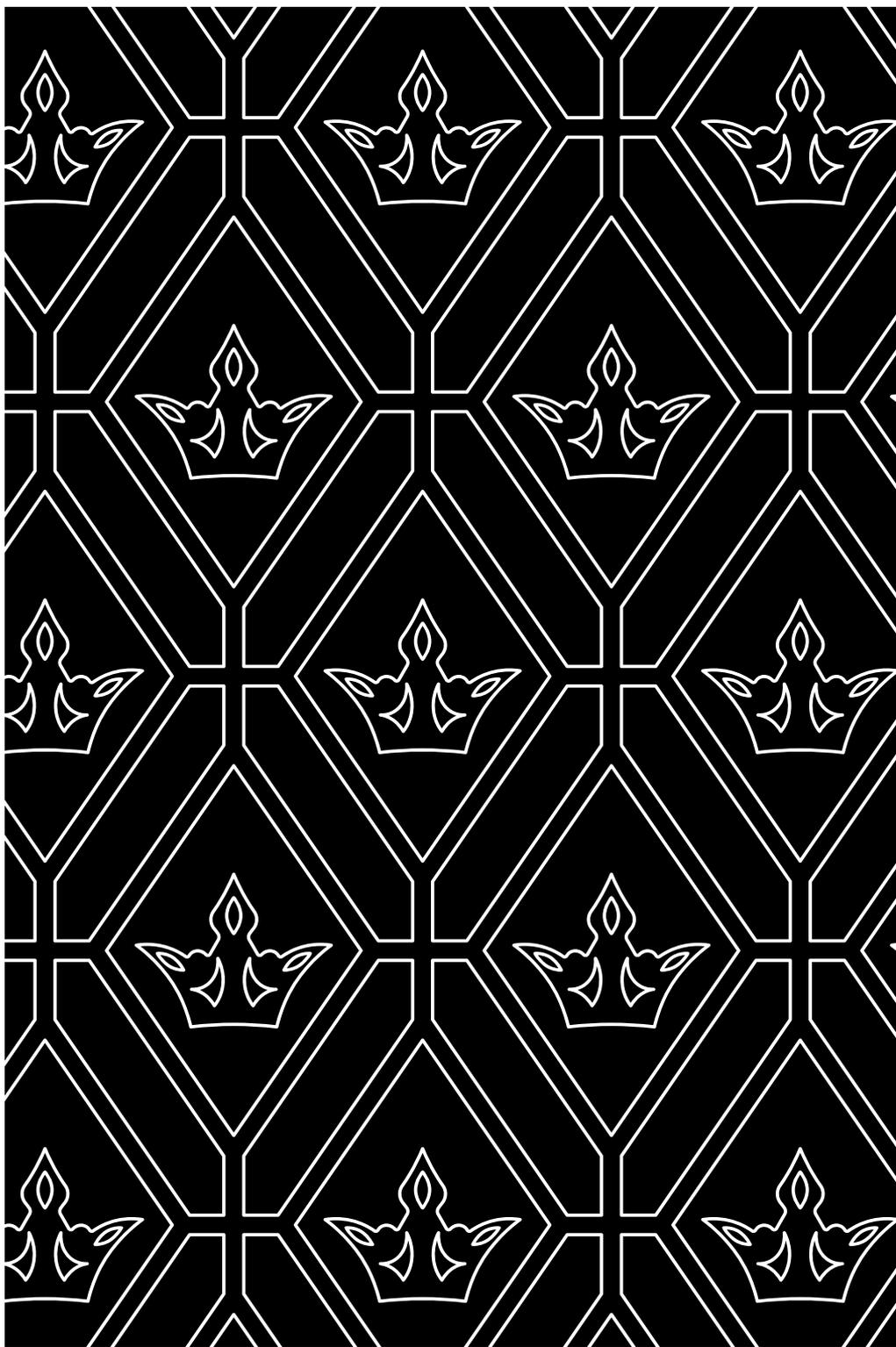
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For Anna, my own Penny and a dedicated Editor



WELSH AND CELTIC TRANSLATIONS

WITH PRONUNCIATION HELP FOR SELECT WORDS

General Notes about Pronunciations

Please note that while there are variations in Welsh pronunciation, for the most part, the suggested pronunciations follow the northern rules (at least for vowels). Also, there are no silent letters in Welsh, so everything is pronounced.

Vowel sounds are generally short for words with more than one syllable, a=*pat*; e=*pet*; i=*pit*; o=*pot*; u=*pit* (yes, u=i most of the time); w=oo as in the word *book* (yes, w is often a vowel); y=uh, like the a, in the word *above*.

Single syllable words typically use long vowel sounds [a=*father*; e=ae like *aerodynamic*; i=i in the word *machine*; o=aw like the word *hawk*; w=oo like the word *pool*; u & y are the same as i].

Ch sounds like the Scottish *loch*, not the English *church*. Not all words are Welsh in origin, for those without clear pronunciation rules, Welsh was used.

As for stresses, they typically fall on the second to last syllable. Also, while *Cait Sith* would typically be pronounced Ket Shee, I've left it as Kate Sith—call it writer's license if you must.

Below are definitions and pronunciations for the most common Welsh words.

Amddiffyniadau (am-thi-fuh-nia-dya): A Druid book of protections

Bedwyr (Bed-wir): One of Arthur's knights

Bodach (baw-dach): Entities from the fifth dimension trapped in the lower planes

Cait Sith (Kate Sith): Multi-dimensional cats native to our dimension

Caradog (Kair-ah-dog): One of Arthur's knights

Carchar enaid (kar-kar enide): Soul Prison—an object used by druids to control the power of others

Cei (Kay): One of Arthur's knights

Coch Coblyn (Koch Kob-luhn): Red Leprechaun

Conglfaen (Kongl-vyn): Keystone Talisman

Crom Dubh (Krom Doow): Powerful Bodach that takes an elemental form in the lower planes

Da bo ti fy ffrind (da bo ti vuh frind): Goodbye, my friend

Dawnus (dow-nis): Gifted, someone who can see spirits or has premonitions

Diafol Fragu (dia-vol fra-gi): Devil's brew, a Welsh curse

Derwyddon tân (dare-ooey-thon taan): Druid's Fire, used to control higher dimensional entities

Enaid (enide): Soul, a person's spiritual essence

Fomoire (vo-moy-ray): Demon/entity from a dark matter universe

Gwysio sianel (gwuh-sio sia-nel): Summoning channel from our universe into the upper dimensions

Hudoliaethau (Hid-oh-li-ee-sa): A druid book of incantations

Hysbrydion (Hes-bird-yun): Spirits/entities from the higher planes

Picau ar y maen (Pi-cair-uh-mine): Traditional Welsh cake flavored with cinnamon and nutmeg

Rhyfeddol (rhuh-veth-ool): Druid incantation of control

Teyrnwialen o Saith (teyrn-ialen aw syth): Scepter of Seven

PROLOGUE
LONDON IN 1666

IN A DIMLY LIT ROOM, THOMAS FARYNOR LIFTED THE NEARLY fifty-pound sack of flour from the floor onto the heavy wooden kneading table. He opened the sack and carefully poured the flour into a giant ceramic mixing bowl. Despite his care, a puff of fine, brown dust rose from the bowl enveloping his face. He stifled a sneeze and waited for the cloud of flour to settle. Flour dust and flames were an explosive mix that had destroyed more than a few bakeries. Satisfied it was safe, he retrieved the lantern from the outside windowsill. Using its flame, he lit small kindling fires at the back of each of his three open-hearth brick ovens. The glow from the ovens filled the room, revealing the all too small pile of wood next to the ovens.

He shook his head. "William!"

His son appeared from around the corner of the ovens.

"William, we need more wood."

"Are we baking cottage loaves tonight?" the young man asked.

"Of course. Tomorrow's the first Sunday of September, and you know what that means."

"Yes, the city will be full of people going to the Feast of the Farmer at St. Paul's."

"Hours of listening to the good Abbot lecturing against the sins of gluttony and lust hardly qualifies as a feast to me." Thomas chuckled. "But the important thing is, those people will be hungry. A lot of 'em are going to come down Fleet Street on their way to the bridge. And who are they going to pass at the corner of Fleet and Pudding Lane?"

"Us."

"That's right . . . hundreds of hungry souls walking right by our door. We'll sell as many loaves as we can bake. By stacking the dough into cottage loaves, we can make twice as many loaves and still sell 'em for the same price as regular ones," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "But we need a hotter oven. And for that, we need more wood."

"Father, it'll take me half the night to bring in that much wood. Who will help you knead the dough and stack the loaves?"

"Good point, son. Wake our boarder. As a journeyman carpenter, I'm sure he has plenty of experience hauling wood. Promise him an extra loaf for his help."

"Is it really necessary to offer him an extra loaf?"

"No, but he did a fine job repairing the cooling shelves; saved us half a shilling and several days of lost baking. Remember, any man can have a turn of bad luck. Someday, we may need the charity and grace of another." Thomas placed his hand on William's shoulder

and smiled. “Now be quick about it so you have time to help me with the baking. I’ll even let you make your own loaves.”

William smiled back at his father, then disappeared around the corner. He hadn’t been gone a minute when Thomas heard a loud banging at the door. He added some larger kindling to the fires and followed the sound. He opened it, expecting to find his son or the journeyman bearing an armload of firewood, but was surprised to see a small, disheveled man dressed in red, leaning on a gnarled walking stick.

“Pardon me, sir for the lateness of the hour, but there’s a chill in the air and me bones are too tired to sleep on the street. Could ya see it in yer kind heart to spare a soul a warm place to pass the remaining hours of the night?”

“I’ve no time for beggars now. I’ve got baking to do. Come back after the morning crowd’s been by, and I’ll have a crust for you.” He started to close the door.

“I’m no *beggar*. I’m merely a weary traveler denied the comfort of a warm fire in a strange place. Perhaps I’ll have to teach the citizens of this unfriendly town a lesson in kindness.” He banged his walking stick on the ground, spritely spun about, and walked away into the darkness.

Scratching his head at the odd spectacle, Thomas closed the door and turned back toward the hearth . . . just as William and the journeyman brought in their first load of wood.

“Father, what was that about?”

“Just a beggar.”

“A strange time of night for a beggar.”

“True, he was a strange beggar alright. A short, scruffy fellow dressed in red looking for a warm place to spend the night.”

“Dressed in red?” the journeyman asked.

“Yes, all red, and he had a stout walking stick. No matter; he’s gone. Now, why don’t you two fetch some more wood while I add what you’ve brought to the fire.”

The journeyman twisted a five-stoned ring on his finger and whispered, “*Coch Coblyn.*”



A WINTER'S DAY IN PIPER FALLS

PENNY LEANED AGAINST ONE OF THE CENTURIES-OLD TREES IN Schoen Park. She nervously pulled her hat down over her ears. While a cold north wind blew through the park, she knew it wasn't the terrestrial weather that sent chills down her spine. It was the microfractures in the dimensional fabric. They signaled a pending temporal event when multiple timelines would coexist in the same physical space. Episodes of folded time were normally rare, but over the last several weeks, they had become quite common in Piper Falls.

Mr. Myrdin, who was *the* Merlin of Arthurian legend, and his companion Master Poe—a higher dimensional being trapped in a raven's body—tied the surge to their recent battle against the *Crom*

Dubh. It had taken the three of them and her best friend Duncan working together to defeat the icy extra-dimensional creature. While they had saved the universe from invasion, the monster's explosive death overloaded the dimensional fabrics with extra-dimensional energy. The resulting temporal aftershocks caused the increase in time folds.

Usually, time folds were short-lived phenomena that would fade away on their own. They might create a few paranormal incidents but were otherwise harmless. Unfortunately, the ones created by the aftershocks were more powerful. In addition to potentially trapping people on the wrong side of the fold they also attracted the shadow-like entities known as the *Bodach*.

The *Bodach's* connection to the fifth dimension had given them god-like powers in our universe. As teachers, they had helped establish early human civilizations. Eventually, they established themselves as deities reigning over the world. When Master Poe's arrival severed that connection, they lost their powers and began to slowly fade into nonexistence. Those who survived were drawn to extra-dimensional phenomena. If they successfully tapped into one of the powerful time folds, they could regain their powers.

To prevent that, Penny and Duncan had spent the month since the battle chasing and closing time folds. Penny's misalignment, which allowed her to interact with the higher dimensions, let her sense and close the time folds before they went critical. Using a talisman fashioned by Penny and Master Poe, Duncan was able to help her spot the folds.

He also made sure none of the "normal" townsfolk accidentally found themselves on the wrong side when Penny closed it. Tonight, they also had help from Simon, Penny's extra-dimensional cat known as a *Cait Sith*.

Time folds began as a singularity of extreme cold on the dimensional fabric. As they expanded, the fabric became thinner, creating small gaps. When the gaps became large enough, strands of time could leak through and weave an alternative timeline on top of the existing one. This singularity was the coldest and fastest-growing one Penny had ever encountered. Almost as soon as they had spotted it, the yellow time strands from the past began wriggling through.

“That’s a big one,” Duncan said.

“Yeah, it’s also moving really fast. And someone was near the back entrance to the park. Can you run over there and make sure whoever it is doesn’t get too close?”

“No problem,” he said and took off down the snow-covered path.

What about me? Simon’s familiar voice said in her mind.

I didn’t forget about you. I haven’t sensed any Bodach, but with a fold this powerful, it won’t be long before they show up. Do you think you can keep them away?

Of course, I am Cait Sith.

Penny reached her hand down and scratched the large black cat across the star-shaped, white spot on his chest. A small purr emanated from the *Cait Sith* before he turned and left.

Confident that she wouldn’t be disturbed, Penny turned her attention to the growing singularity. Seven yellow strands from the past had already slipped through and were interweaving themselves with the blue strands from the present. They were well on their way to forming an intermingled timeline.

Penny reached into the mass of yellow and blue time strands. Each strand was about five feet long and as thick as her pinkie. She grabbed the nearest yellow filament in her right hand. The cool

sensation of interdimensional energy raced up her arm. She gave the strand a slight twist and a gentle tug. Its far end slipped through the incomplete weaving. She passed it to her left hand and grabbed a second, then a third strand. Despite her early concerns, closing this powerful singularity was going quite smoothly.

That changed the instant she turned back to reach for the fourth strand. Two new time filaments had emerged from the singularity. She had seen that once before, but these two filaments were unlike any she had ever encountered. They were intertwined like a tightly braided rope. The only way she could tell them apart was that instead of being yellow, one of them was blood red.

Even stranger, instead of working with the other strands to create a stable timeline, the new double strand followed a different pattern. It slipped in and out of the interdimensional tapestry the others were weaving.

Once its full length was enmeshed in their weaving, it began violently twisting and coiling itself. Within just a few seconds, the entire alternate timeline framework was ruined. All that remained was a roiling tangle of yellow and blue time strands with bits and pieces of the braided strand sticking out in odd places.

Penny glanced from the knot to the singularity, which was continuing to grow. While she couldn't see them yet, she sensed the approach of more yellow time strands. She needed to send the first set back through the singularity, but she couldn't do that until she separated them from the blue strands that belonged in this time.

She took a deep breath and studied the knot. She found a pair of yellow strands that looked promising, but when she pulled them nothing happened. She tried several more combinations of yellow strands but met the same result. If anything, the knot was now tighter and churning more rapidly. She began to wonder if this was

an unsolvable puzzle like the one Alexander the Great faced with the Gordian knot. His solution was to cut the knot with his sword. She had no idea how to cut a time strand, much less what would happen if she did.

Penny, several of your friends are approaching the park.

Penny glanced toward the park gate. Gene Shoemaker, Eddie Macias, Mark Chapman, and the Anderson twins, Mary and Grace, had spotted her and were heading into the park. Besides Duncan, they were her closest friends, but none of them knew about misalignment, extra-dimensional beings, or that Mr. Myrdin was the real Merlin. There'd been a few close calls, but other than a few annoying rumors about a budding romance between her and Duncan, no one suspected anything.

Duncan will take care of them, Penny said.

He's at the other end of the park keeping that strange sign-waving man out.

Mr. Potter, the town's eccentric, sure seemed to have a gift for poor timing! *Can you keep them out?*

I am with them now. The girls are petting me, but the boys are less interested. I do not think they will wait much longer.

Master Poe's advice to her had been that once she started mending the fold, she needed to finish at all costs. He didn't say what would happen if she didn't, although she got the impression it wouldn't be good. If she couldn't untie the knot, all she could do was send all the strands through the singularity. If she did that, she would alter the fold and send some of the blue strands from the present into the past.

There was no telling what those strands would bring with them. While unlikely, Mr. Potter and her friends could get pulled into the past.

The boys have left and are only steps away from entering the park, Simon said.

She decided to give it one more try. She reached into the spinning maelstrom of time strands and grabbed one. As soon as she touched it, she knew it was the braided red and yellow strand. Besides being thicker than the others, the braided strand was strangely warm. Its temperature rose quickly, and in a few seconds, it became too hot to hold. She let go. As soon as she did a brilliant orange flash filled her vision. When it cleared, the roiling knot was gone. Even more astonishing, in her left hand, she held seven yellow time strands.

Simon's voice rang in her head. *The boys are at the gate.*

Faster than she thought possible, she opened a trans-dimensional rift, placed the yellow strands in it, and launched the rift through the singularity. It shrank to nothing and vanished, taking all signs of the time fold with it.

At that very instant, Gene Shoemaker crossed under the park's gate. As he did, the tassels on his wool hat floated through the air until they were standing up above his head.

With his eyes wide open, he said, "Hey! What's going on?"

"Dude, you look like a giant bug with antennae coming out of your head!" Eddie Macias said.

A spark jumped between the floating tassels, emitting an audible crack. They dipped down a bit but continued to float above Gene's head.

"Wow, that was wicked cool!" Eddie said.

"Awesome!" Mark Chapman said.

Grace Anderson rushed up to Gene. "Are you okay?"

Her twin sister, Mary, scowled at the other two boys. "This is nothing to laugh about. That was a powerful electrical shock. Gene could get seriously hurt."

Gene placed his hand on Grace's shoulder, looked her in the eyes, and shook his head. "Other than a slight ringing in my ears, I feel fine."

Duncan arched his eyebrows toward Penny as they both arrived on the scene. She pursed her lips and shrugged.

Mr. Potter, his fliers in hand, came to the gate a moment later and said, "I've seen this type of thing before. It's a buildup of static electricity. You know, kind of like what happens when you drag your feet on the carpet. Probably the combination of this dry winter air and passing under the wrought iron park gate."

"Are you sure?" Mark asked.

"Absolutely, we just need to give the charge a path to the ground and everything will be fine," Mr. Potter said.

"How do we do that?" Mary asked.

"One of us just has to touch one of the tassels," Mr. Potter said.

"I don't know. Did you see that spark?" Eddie asked.

Mark chimed in. "Yeah, that'll be one wicked shock."

"Nonsense," Mr. Potter reached out with a gloved hand and grabbed the left tassel. As soon as he touched it, there was a loud *crack!* Mr. Potter was knocked off his feet. If not for Duncan and Penny, he would've fallen to the ground.

"Are you okay, Mr. Potter?" Grace asked.

"Uh, yeah, I'm fine." He looked a little like Albert Einstein in that famous picture with his hair standing on end. Using his hands, he tried to force his hair back down onto his head. For the most part, it worked, but a few stragglers continued to resist gravity's pull. "It was a big static charge, but nothing more than a little shock," he smiled. Wiggling his fingers, he looked at his smoldering glove. "I guess I'll need a new pair of gloves."



ACROSS TOWN, A FEW HOURS LATER

NOT LONG AFTER THEY BUMPED INTO EACH OTHER AT LAST year's haunted Halloween party at the Bluebird Inn, Emily Robertson's secret crush on Ted Malone, her co-worker at the Monroe Institute, blossomed into a whirlwind romance. By December, they were a steady couple. They made it official when Ted spent Christmas at her parents' farm just outside of town. Ever the gentleman, he never complained about staying in the frigid, unheated guest room.

He spent a good portion of Christmas day with her father splitting wood for the stoves that heated the rest of the old farmhouse and helping her mother clean the dishes after their Christmas dinner.

In the few weeks since then, things had only gotten better. Emily wasn't sure what love was supposed to feel like, but she knew it couldn't possibly be better than what she felt for Ted.

She leaned across the car seat and playfully kissed him on the cheek.

“What was that for?”

Smiling, “Just for being you.”

Ted momentarily took his eyes off the road to return Emily's smile.

Suddenly, Emily screamed, “Ahh! Ted, stop!”

Startled, Ted paused before looking up to see what looked like a gnarled dwarf version of Santa Claus standing in the road. He jerked the wheel. There was a loud *thump* and a *bump* as the pick-up truck swerved into the opposite lane. Ted quickly regained control and pulled off the road onto the shoulder.

“Do you think we hit him?” Emily asked.

“We hit something, but I don't know what it was.” Visibly shaken, Ted unfastened his seatbelt and opened his door.

Emily followed him down the road. In the twilight, she could make out a small lump lying on the shoulder of the road. She ran to catch up to Ted, reaching him just as he stooped over the lump. “I think I might have hit this deer.”

“Is it dead, and what do you mean you *think* you hit it?”

“It's dead, but it looks like it's been here for a while.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Well, there are teeth marks on it like something's been eating it.”

“Maybe you hit what was eating it?” she suggested.

“Maybe, but the only footprints besides ours and the deer's belong to another person. Someone wearing long, pointed shoes.”

“Pointed shoes? Like high heels?”

“No, more like one of Santa’s elves, albeit a very *heavy* elf,” he chuckled.

“I don’t mean to sound crazy,” Emily said, she paused and bit her lip, “but when I screamed, I swear I saw a little man at the side of the road.”

“Was he wearing red?”

“Uh-huh. How do you know?”

“I think I saw him, too. Help me look in the brush. Maybe we hit him and knocked him off the road. He might be unconscious.”

Before they stepped off the road, they heard what sounded like an angry curse followed by several *pops* and a gentle hissing sound coming from Ted’s pick-up. They ran back to the truck. Emily swore she heard a melodic laugh from somewhere in the woods.

She looked at Ted, but his attention was focused on his truck’s tires. “Can I borrow your phone? I need to call a tow truck, and I should probably call the sheriff.”

“Why? What’s wrong?”

“All four tires are flat.”

“That’s strange.”

“That’s not the weirdest part. They all have identical puncture marks in them.”

“Like they’ve been slashed?”

“No, more like they’ve been bitten.”



KRIS JENKINS TOOK A DRINK OF WATER, SWISHED IT AROUND HER mouth, and spit the last remnants of toothpaste into her bathroom sink. She stared at her tear-streaked face in the mirror and wondered if she’d made a mistake in breaking things off with Randy.

To her reflection, she said, “He’s a good guy, but there’s no magic when he kisses me. A girl needs to feel a little magic from her man, doesn’t she?”

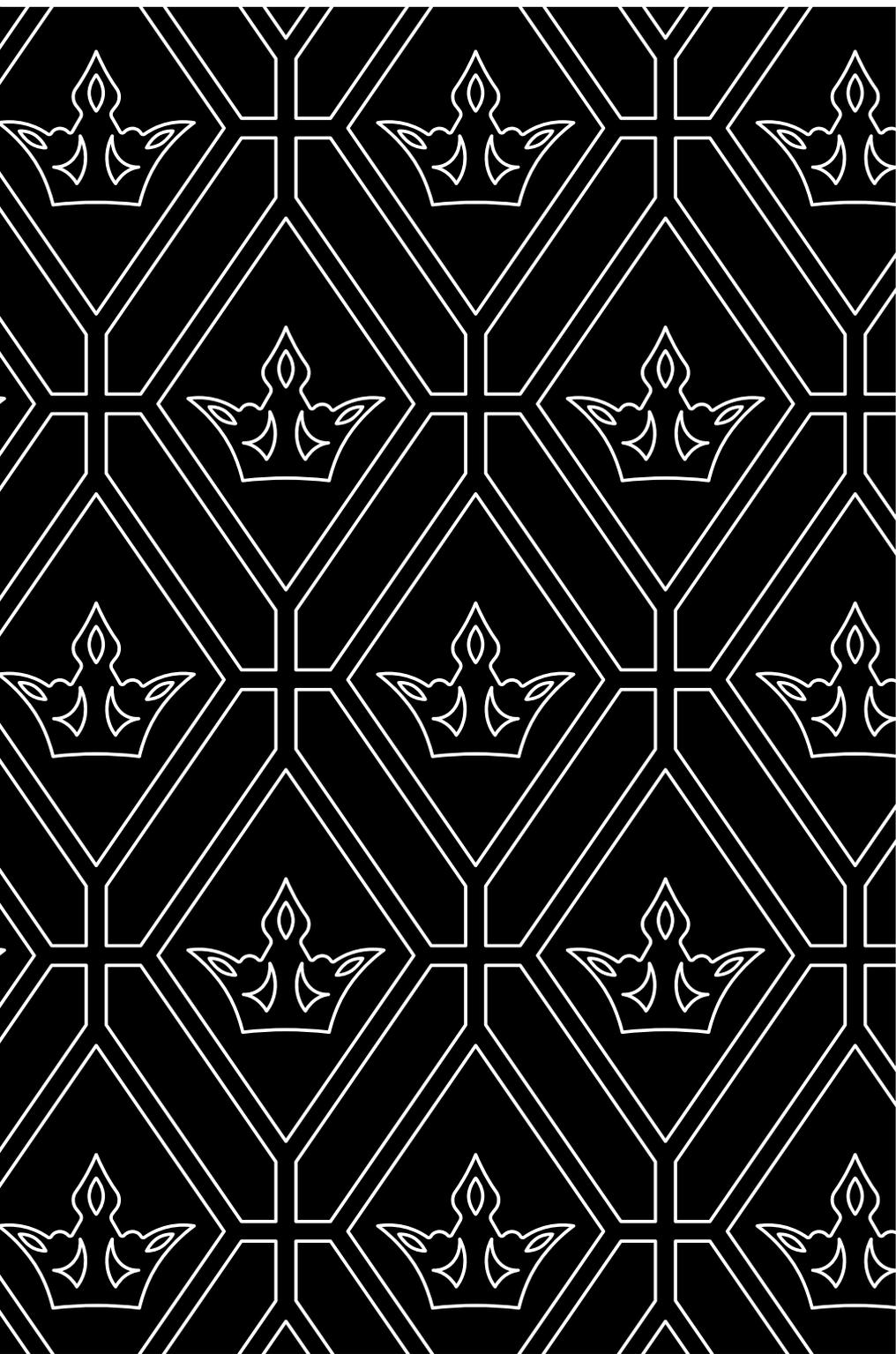
As if in answer to her question, there was a loud knocking on her front door. She hesitated. She wasn’t sure she had the strength to face Randy again. The knocking persisted. Unable to resist, she wiped away her tears, grabbed her robe, quickly looked in the mirror, and headed to the door. On the way, she promised herself she wouldn’t take him back no matter what he said.

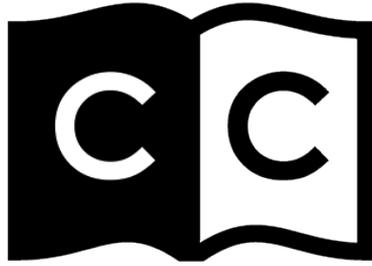
She opened the door, fully expecting to hear Randy’s voice begging her to give him another chance. But instead, a strange, almost musical voice said, “Pardon me, ma’am, but it’s a wee bit cold out this evenin’. Could ya see it in yer kind heart to spare some time by the fire for a down on his luck soul?”

She looked down and saw that the voice emanated from a stunted man with a long, ratty beard dressed in shabby red clothes. He held an oversized red cap in one hand and a gnarled wooden cane in the other. She noticed that his feet and hands were very long and out of proportion to his size. He reminded her of a grotesque cross between a troll and a garden gnome.

Despite his pleasant harmonious voice, the site of the twisted little man sent Kris’s pulse racing. She wanted to scream. Her mouth dropped open, but nothing emerged. Not knowing what else to do, she slammed the door shut, bolted it, and ran back to her bedroom. She buried herself under her covers and drifted into a fitful, nightmare-filled sleep.

Kris woke up the next morning to the *ding-dong* of her doorbell. She looked at her clock. Who would come by at eight thirty in the morning on a Sunday in Piper Falls? Sure she’d imagined it, she fluffed her pillow and closed her eyes.





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THERE'S MORE TO THIS SCEPTER THAN MEETS THE EYE

Eighth-grader Penny Preston has unwittingly released two time-travelers from the distant past—one, a strange elf-like creature, is an evil spirit from Celtic myth with a penchant for igniting fires, and the other is the sole survivor from an ancient civilization that created the prehistoric scepter recently discovered in Piper Falls.

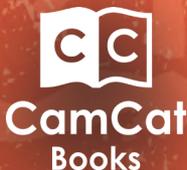
When a series of baffling events haunts the town, Penny and her friends must race to unravel the secrets of the scepter to prevent the two time-travelers from using it to change history and return to power. Trouble is, one of them seems to share Penny's misaligned powers . . .

In the Misaligned series, teenager Penny Preston can fix and prevent dimensional rifts. When dangerous higher-dimensional beings threaten to invade Piper Falls, she embraces her special powers. Look in the back of this book for a special preview of *Penny Preston and the King's Blade*.

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Penny Preston and the Raven's Talisman, Misaligned Book 1 (re-released Winter 2020)

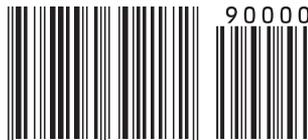
Penny Preston and the King's Blade, Misaligned Book 3 (will be re-released Spring 2021)



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