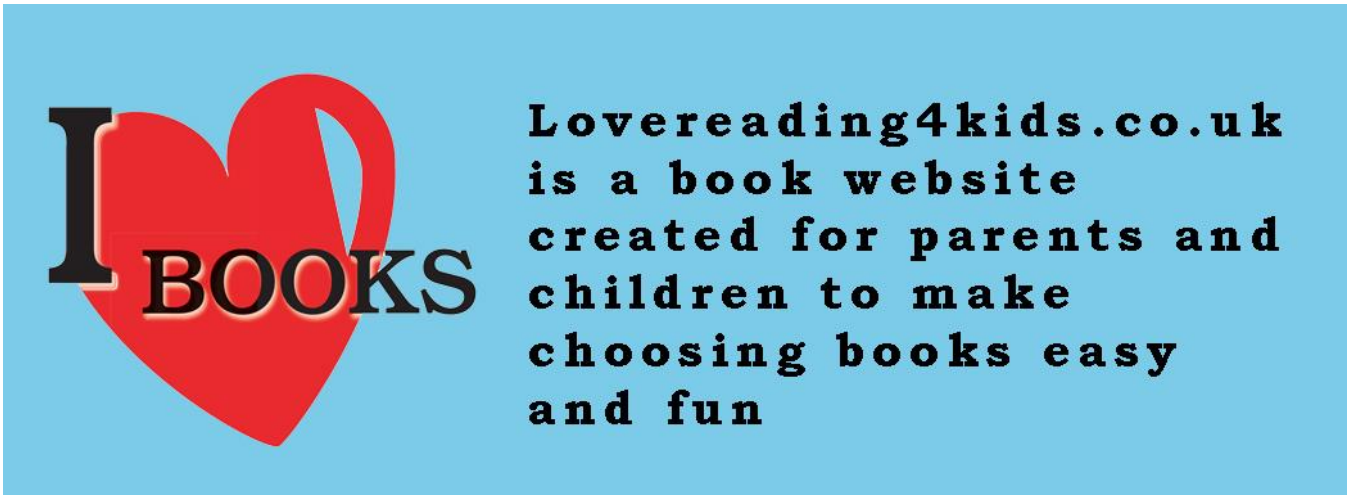


Opening extract from

Here be Witches

Written by

Sarah Mussi

Published by

Shrine Bell an imprint of Vertebrate Publishing

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Here Be Witches
Sarah Mussi

First published in 2017 by Shrine Bell, an imprint of Vertebrate Publishing

Shrine Bell
Crescent House, 228 Psalter Lane, Sheffield, S11 8UT, UK
www.shrinebell.com

Copyright © Sarah Mussi 2017

Sarah Mussi has asserted her rights under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as author of this work.

Cover design by Nathan Ryder
Cover photo by Keld Bach, www.keldbach.com
Typesetting and production by Jane Beagley
Author photograph © Roger Bool

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, events and incidents are products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-911342-32-8 (Paperback)
ISBN 978-1-911342-33-5 (ebook)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic, or mechanised, including photocopying, recording, taping or information storage and retrieval systems – without the written permission of the publisher.

Production by Vertebrate Publishing
www.v-publishing.co.uk

Shrine Bell is committed to printing on paper from sustainable sources.

FSC logo here

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

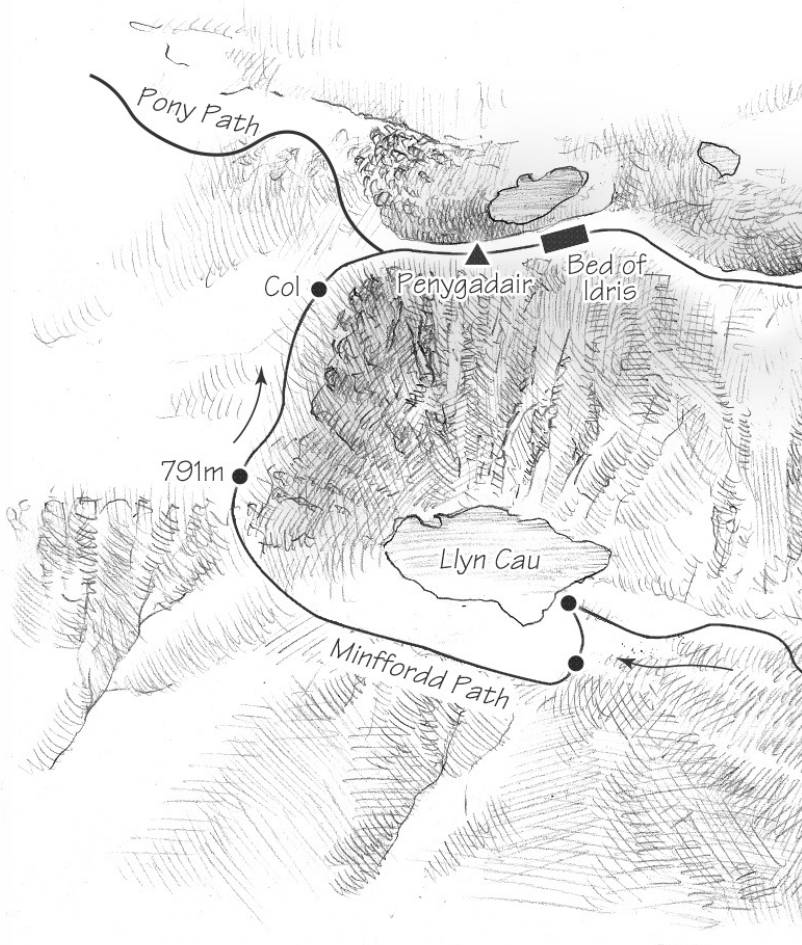
Dedication

To IDRIS GAWR, Stargazer,
Overlord and Giant of Cadair Idris

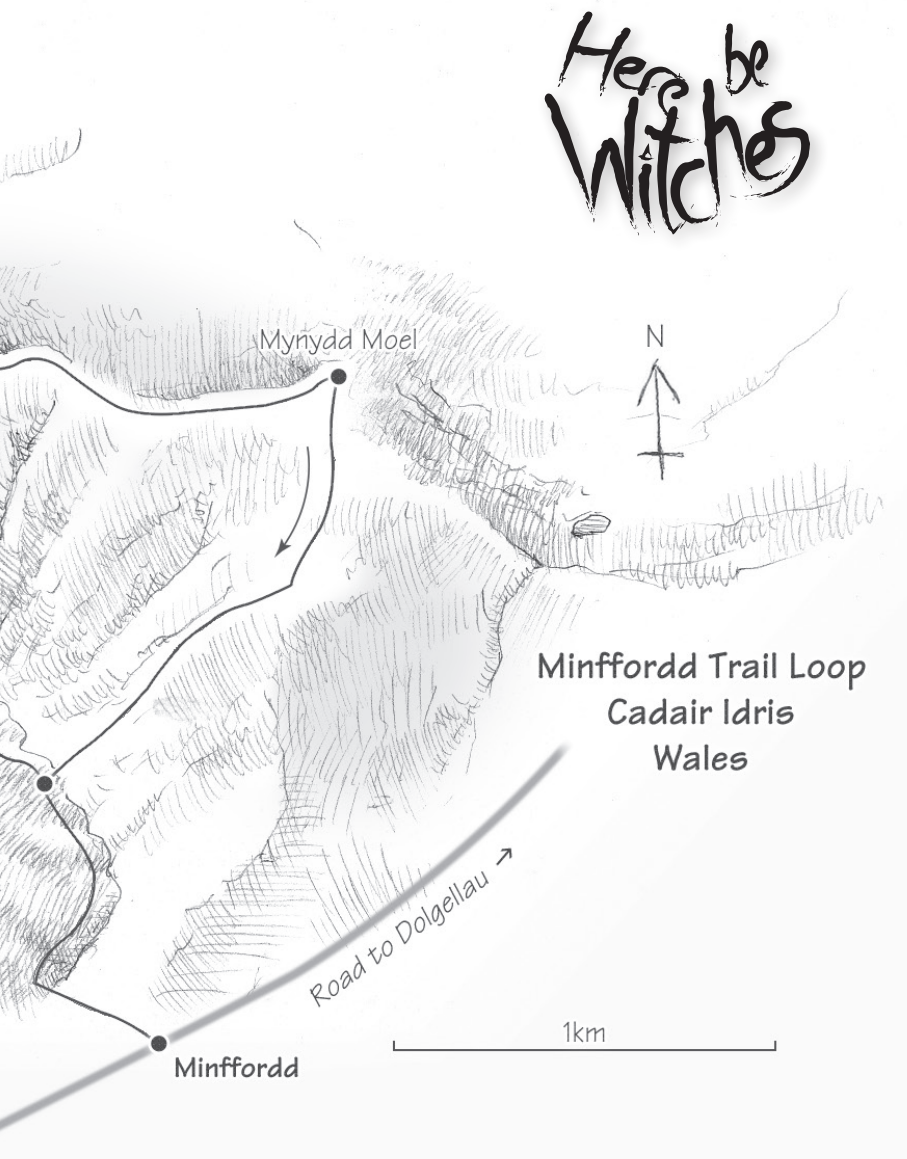
In the land of Merioneth in the parish of Dolgelley in the commote of Talybont is a mount or peak or large high hill that is called Cadair Idris. And on the highest crown of this mountain is a bed-shaped form, great in length and width, built of slabs with stones fixed thereon. And this is called The Bed of Idris. And it is said that of whoever lies and sleeps upon that bed, from sunset until sunrise, one of two things will happen to him: either he will be a hero or poet or bard of the best kind, or descend from that great mountain entirely demented.

From *The Giants of Wales and Their Dwellings*

Sion Dafydd Rhys, *c.*1600
Peniarth Manuscript



The ascents of Cadair Idris


Here be Witches
Mynydd Moel
N
Minffordd Trail Loop
Cadair Idris
Wales
Road to Dolgellau
1km
Minffordd

As Above

29 February – Leap Year
At the witching hour upon the eve of St David's Day

The girl turns her masked face to the summit, above her the air shudders. Just seconds left. If only she can time it right. Heart pounding, blood hammering, she poises herself. She pulls out the mirror, angles it, catches the reflection of the dark night and the stars.

I can do this, she tells herself. I am the High Priestess. I am the Supreme One.

Then she recites aloud:

'Winds of time meet me here,
Upon the stroke of midnight clear,
Spin a girdle round the heavens,

When the magick words are spoken,
Let the future rush to meet us,
Let the time between be broken,
Hurry the hours, tear down the clocks,
Speed up the procession of the equinox,
O winds of time, hear me say,
Let tomorrow be today.'

She beckons to the rest of the coven. Twelve girls – faces covered with masks, clad from head to toe in black cloaks, tall hats, dark skirts – all close in. They trace a circle widdershins around a great cauldron set on a smouldering fire. One girl, petite and pretty, chants:

'Oh mighty dragon of the fire,
Grant me the power that I desire,
Power of water and air from the sky,
And earth and fire that let you fly.'

But the Supreme One steadies the mirror, whispers instead:

'Oh mighty dragon of the ice,
Grant me the power in measure twice,
And take thee, thy human sacrifice.'

The girls stop and hold out their left hands. And on each palm is marked a star. They hold them up to the night sky, baring them towards the constellation of Draco, in which the Pole Star – Polaris, the North Star – shines, and they recite:

'Air and water, fire and earth,
In darkest night we wait your birth,

By light of moon, or ray of sun,
Let Merlin's magick be undone,

The hour has come of this leap year,
The time is right to reappear,

Forever you were, forever you shall be,
By Draco's grace we set you free,

Oh mighty dragons whom this spell release,
Crack open the fortress of Dinas Emrys.'

The moment strikes midnight.

The Supreme One breathes on the mirror, clouds it over with her breath, cries out, 'AS ABOVE – SO BELOW, SO MOTE IT BE!'

The mountain slope shudders. The cauldron boils over. The face of the full moon darkens. There is a roaring and far away the sound of many stones cracking.

Then the mountain splits wide.

An appalling shriek rents the air. Yellow eyes glint through the darkness, teeth crash, talons scrape. A fetid stench slams into the night. And under their feet a ravine opens. A yawning cliff, dropping sheer, smooth, treacherous. And from the lip of this abyss a fearsome creature crawls out.

'Welcome back O White Worm of Wessex,' breathes out the Supreme One.

The dragon blinks at the girls. It unfolds its huge wings and stretches them out, like some nightmarish butterfly emerging from a hideous chrysalis, then it shakes its spiny neck. Its hooded eye settles on the petite, pretty girl.

In an instant she slips. The earth beneath her gives way. A booming, a shrieking tears at her ears. The ground over the old dragons' lair caves in all around her.

The girl skids out of control. She falls. She screams. She stretches out her arms.

'Help!' she cries. 'Somebody help me!' But none dare, as heart bursting, body falling, twisting, turning, she plummets down over the cliff edge.

'SO MOTE IT BE!' roars the dragon.

Down plunges the girl. Down into the dark cavern.

Down on to the sharp crystals.

And as the girl's heart is pierced, the crystals shatter.

At that moment, the whole of the mountain shakes, as if some deep power has been unleashed. There is a rush of heat, a blur of speed. Something passes out of the lair and, like a shooting star, fires up towards the sky. A sudden mist descends; through the darkness the girl-witches see ragged shapes like dark riders galloping away towards the summit of Snowdon.

The air grows cold.

The mountain is still.

The witches blink.

There is no dragon after all. Only their sister-witch impaled upon the rocks below.

The Supreme One hides the mirror under her cloak, takes her birch broom and, wedging it against the rocks, uses it to help her climb down into the roofless cavern. She leaps the last metre to the rocky bottom, but does not check the bleeding body of her friend speared on the broken crystals. Instead she reaches down and picks from the cavern floor a blackened object.

'Yes!' she whispers. The Supreme One slips the charred object beside the mirror, nestles it close to her heart. She mutters to herself, 'So you would challenge me, Ellie Morgan … ' Her voice grows cold, chilling, spiteful: 'We will see about that.'

Then she turns. She reaches the fallen girl.

'Is she OK?' calls a voice from above.

'No,' replies the Supreme One. 'She has passed beyond the veil.'

Then through the dark morning she points a finger at one of the coven. 'Seize her!' she commands. 'Seize Rhiannon!'

Instantly, the witches obey.

'You pushed her,' accuses the Supreme One.

'No!' squeals Rhiannon.

The witches start to chant. One holds Rhiannon. The others circle round her. The Supreme One climbs up out of the cavern. She grabs Rhiannon by the wrist.

'You bring Ellie here,' she says. 'You bring her now! You pin this on her, or I'll pin it on you.'

Then she raises her head to the constellation of Draco shining far above her.

'Fair is foul – foul is fair –
By water, fire, earth and air,
Fair is foul – foul is fair –
Let those who challenge me, BEWARE –
Fair is foul – foul is fair –
FOR I HAVE DESTROYED THE DRAGONS' LAIR!'

So Below

Act One

Here be witches, so they say
Two from the hill and nine from the plain
One for her blood shed all in pain
Summoned by She, from over the sea
Here be witches
Here they be.

From the Coven Song of Dinas Emrys
Anonymous