Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

Witch Baby and Me After Dark

written by

Debi Gliori

published by

Random House Children's Books

© Debi Gliori, 2009, Corgi edition published 2009, an imprint of Random House Children's Books

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

WITCH BABY AND ME AFTER DARK
A CORGI BOOK 978 0 552 55678 1

Published in Great Britain by Corgi Books,
an imprint of Random House Children's Books
A Random House Group Company

This edition published 2009

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Debi Gliori, 2009

The right of Debi Gliori to be identified as the author and illustrator
of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without the prior permission of the publishers.

The Random House Group Limited supports the Forest Stewardship Council
(FSC), the leading international forest certification organization.
All our titles that are printed on Greenpeace-approved FSC-certified
paper carry the FSC logo. Our paper procurement policy can be
found at www.rbooks.co.uk/environment.



Mixed Sources
Product group from well-managed
forests and other controlled sources
www.fsc.org Cert no. TT-COC-2139
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

Set in Adobe Garamond Pro 14/19.5pt by Falcon Oast Graphic Art Ltd.

Designed by Clair Lansley

Corgi Books are published by Random House Children's Books,
61–63 Uxbridge Road, London W5 5SA

www.**kids**at**randomhouse**.co.uk
www.**rbooks**.co.uk

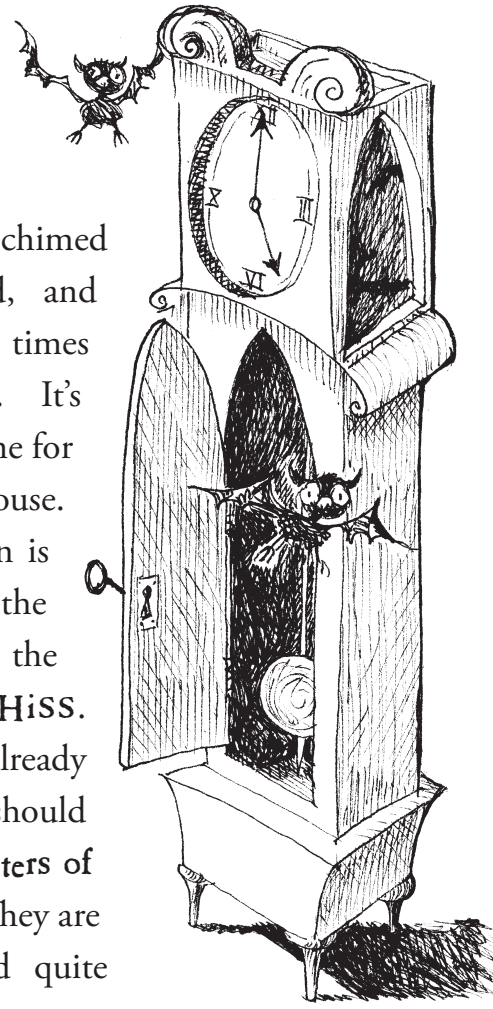
Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited
can be found at: www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm

THE RANDOM HOUSE GROUP Limited Reg. No. 954009

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

Printed and bound in the UK by

WINDING UP THE WITCH



In the hall, a clock chimed five times, paused, and then chimed fifteen times more. Marvellous. It's twenty o'clock – time for supper at Arkon House. This crumbling ruin is home to the Chin, the Nose and the Toad: the legendary **Sisters of Hiss**. In case you haven't already heard of them, you should be warned: the **Sisters of Hiss** are witches. They are very, very old and quite



wrinkly. Nobody is quite sure, but it is possible that the Chin, the Nose and the Toad are at *least* four hundred years old. And, as you can imagine, four hundred years of making breakfast, lunch and supper for her Sisters has turned the Toad into a brilliant cook. Lucky **Sisters of Hiss**. Tonight's supper is bound to be *delicious*.

In the kitchen, the Toad is thriftily preparing supper from yesterday's leftovers. At least, that was the plan until she discovered that someone had already been in the fridge and eaten her ingredients. *All* of them. Ten cold roast potatoes, a bowl of orange-and-honey-glazed carrots, three redcurrant jelly vol-au-vents, five slices of rosemary and garlic roast lamb and . . .

'. . . every last DROP of gravy. Drunk. **Gobbled**. Slurped. *Gone*,' the Toad moaned. 'For heaven's sake, Nose. Did you have to eat *every*thing?'

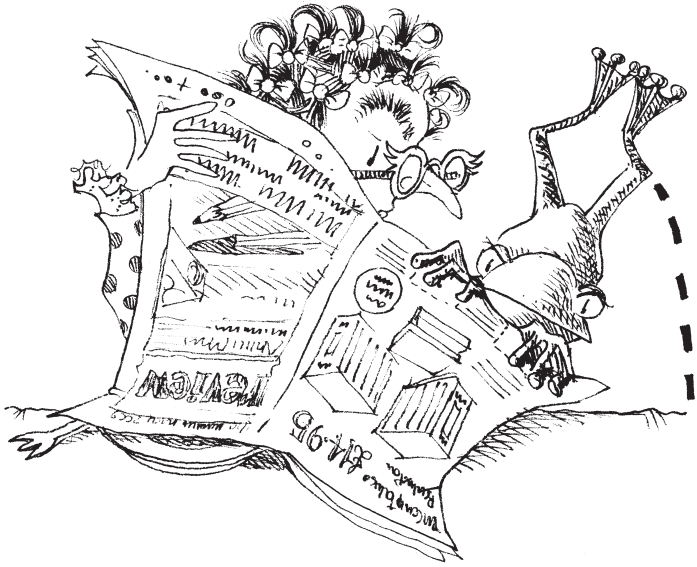
Her face hidden behind the newspaper, the Nose blushed.

'And,' the Toad continued, 'you also ate all my lemon meringue pie. Every last crumb of it. I was soooooo looking forward to having it for pudding tonight. It was the best one I've ever made. How *could* you?'

The Nose wriggled uncomfortably in her seat, and from behind the paper came a loud and fruity **belch**. Across the kitchen, the Chin looked up from her computer and **Tssssked**. 'Dis*gus*ting.'

The Toad slammed the fridge door shut. 'Right,' she said. 'Since *you* ate all the food, Sister dear, *you* can go and pick up some carry-out pizzas for our tea.'

A muffled **squeak** came from behind the newspaper but the Toad was not to be put off. 'And *don't* think we're fooled for one minute



by your pretending to study the paper. We *know* you can't read.' And with one effortless leap, the Toad vaulted onto the table and plucked the newspaper out of the Nose's grasp.

Exposed in mid-gobble, the Nose chewed frantically and tried to pretend she hadn't just been polishing off the last redcurrant jelly vol-au-vent. She blustered, 'Whatever do you

mean?' but since her mouth was full of vol-au-vent, all she managed to say was, '**Foff effa oo oo een**!' before spraying the Toad and most of the table with flecks of uneaten puff pastry.

At this, the Chin gave a despairing groan and stood up. She marched across to the table and raked her Sister with a slitty-eyed glare. 'I've a good mind to turn you into a **sssl**u**g**,' she hissed. 'You're a dis**ss**grace to the name of Hiss.



We are the **Sisters of Hiss**, not the Piggies of Swill. We are witches, *not* mobile puff-pastry disposal units.'

'I beg your **pffff**,' the Nose tried to say, but the Chin was unstoppable.

She bent down close to the Nose. '**Sssoon** it will be **Halloween**,' she said. 'One of the biggest days in the witchy year. The night when every human child for miles around thinks that all they have to do is slip into a black plastic bin-bag, paint their faces green, hurl talcum powder into their hair and – hey, presto – they're witches.'

'Bless,' sighed the tender-hearted Toad. 'If only it were that simp—'

'The *night*,' the Chin interrupted, 'when *real witches* become so full of magic, they almost *sizzle*. Spells pour from their mouths, their



hearts beat faster and faster, their eyes burn like fire, their hair whips from side to side like a nest of maddened snakes—'

'It's not a good look,' muttered the Toad, but the Chin was deaf to all criticism.

'Sparks fly from their fingertips, they almost *glow* in the dark, and woe betide any feeble human who gets in their way. Woe, woe and thrice wo—'

'Yes, yes, yes,' the Nose hissed impatiently. 'And your point is . . . ?'

The Chin's mouth shrank down to a pucker of exasperation. 'My *point* . . .' she said. 'My point is that *this* year we'll have to keep a lid on **Halloween**. This year we're surrounded by humans. That means we mustn't do *anything* to make them suspect that we are witches. At **Halloween** we will have to stay at home and pretend to be two little old ladies and their pet toad. That means no sparks, no fire, no glowing in the dark and definitely no whippy snake-hair.'

'Tell me this is a wind-up,' the Nose gasped. 'You're joking, right?'

The Chin slowly shook her head. 'No. *No. NO.* It's no joking matter. This year' – she took a deep breath – '*this* year, **Halloween** is cancelled.'

One:

A hair-raising bit

I'm staring at my notebook, wishing I could think of a really brilliant idea for a **Halloween** costume. So far, all I've written is:

ghost
dead bride
vampire
mummy
werewolf
witch

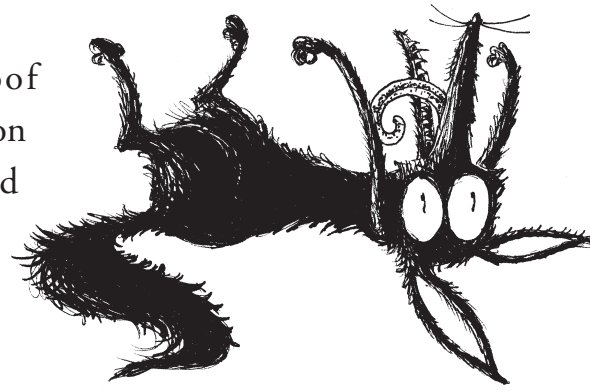


Werewolf and *witch* have circles drawn round them because, as my best friend Vivaldi pointed out, we've already *got* one of each of those.

To explain: my baby sister, Daisy, is a **Witch Baby**. That's witch as in: casts spells and will probably sprout chin warts when she's older. As if she can read my mind,* Daisy stands up, scowls at me, mutters, 'No tin watts, Lil-Lil,' before stomping off to fling herself down on the floor beside her dog, WayWoof. She calls her dog WayWoof because she's too little to say **werewolf** properly.



* She *can* read my mind, it's just that she's too wee to understand what it says yet.



WayWoof rolls over on her back and stretches blissfully, gives a fifty-fang yawn and promptly goes back to sleep again. She does a lot of sleeping these days, does WayWoof. Sleeping, eating and growing really fat. Or at least, her tummy is. The rest of her is normal, if you can say that about a dog who is

a) magical

b) invisible (to everyone except Daisy, Vivaldi and me)**

** To explain: Daisy can see WayWoof because it was Daisy who magicked her into existence. I'm not one hundred per cent sure, but I *think* Vivaldi and I can see WayWoof because we were both born under a Blue Moon. Dad says Blue Moons are rare and magical things, and if you're lucky enough to be born under one, then that means you can see things that nobody else can. Like WayWoofs, for instance. But my big brother, Jack, says that's complete rubbish and a Blue Moon is simply the second moon in a month that has had one full moon already. Or the fourth full moon in a season with three full moons. Or . . . Understandably, Vivaldi and I prefer Dad's explanation. Vivaldi and I are slightly magical — *wee WOO-HOO* — but nothing *like* as magical as Daisy — *big WOO-HOO*.

c) something my witchy
baby sister conjured up

Oh yes, and d:

d) the **smelliest** dog
imaginable.

Add together a skunk, a gas leak, a decomposing squashed toad and a pile of rotting turnips and you've got

Eau de WayWoof

I wonder if her puppies will smell as bad?



Vivaldi is lying on the floor next to WayWoof, patting her tummy (WayWoof's) and trying to guess how many puppies might be growing in there. Daisy has grown bored of WayWoof-adoration: she has turned herself into a bat and is hanging upside down from the lightshade.

Strange as it may seem, this is what passes for a normal afternoon at my house.

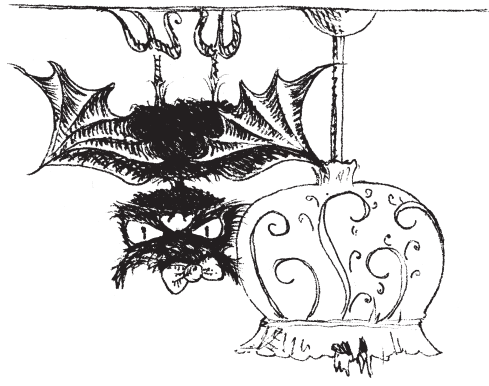
'So,' I groan, '**Halloween**. Help me out here. What can we go as?'

'I like the idea of mummies,' Vivaldi says. 'It's probably pretty easy to do – it won't be difficult to find some old sheets to rip up as bandages, and once we're all wrapped up, nobody will have a clue *who* we are.'

Good point. There's nothing more embarrassing than going round houses at **Halloween**, all dressed up in what you hope is a really nail-bitingly terrifying costume,* only to have adults peering at you and saying, 'Very nice, dear. Lily, isn't it? And what *are* you supposed to be, pet?'

'No wantit be mumma,' Daisy chips in. 'Wantit be pider.'

* In Scotland, this is called *guising*. This is short for we-disguise-ourselves-and-perform-in-the-hope-you'll-give-us-sweets-and-money. In America they have something faintly similar called *trick-or-treating*. This is short for we-trick-or-terrify-you-into-giving-us-a-treat-or-else. Not the same thing at all.



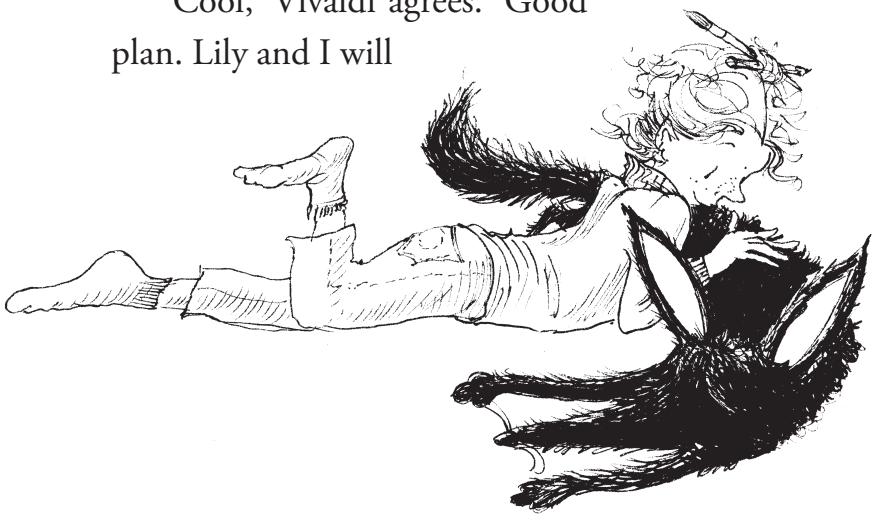
I look up. The Daisy-bat is dangling from the ceiling, wings folded across her chest, a determined glint in her beady black eyes. I look down. WayWoof is snoozing on the rug. A bat *and* a WayWoof. Yikes. Daisy is doing *two spells at once*. I wonder if it's the approach of **Halloween** that's making her more powerful.

When Daisy first magicked WayWoof into our lives, I quickly realized how useful she was. (WayWoof, not Daisy.) WayWoof acted like an early-warning, incoming-spell alert. Daisy was just a tiny baby witch, so she could only manage

one spell at a time, so when WayWoof started to f a d e away, *that* meant Daisy was about to cast a new spell. Back then, Daisy was a strictly-one-spell-at-a-time Witch Baby. But now my little sister has magically transformed herself into a bat, yet . . . WayWoof is *still there*, still visible, still— **Aaaaagh**. Way*Woof*. **Urrrghhh.** Blissfully unaware that WayWoof has just let rip, Daisy flaps her wings and repeats herself. Somewhat louder.

'NO WANTIT MUMMA. WANTIT PIDER.'

'Cool,' Vivaldi agrees. 'Good plan. Lily and I will



be mummies and you can be the spider from the mummies' tomb.'

I was about to point out that this would mean making a spider costume for Daisy when I remembered. Witch Babies don't need **Halloween** costumes made for them. Witch Babies come as themselves.

Woo-hoo – here comes the REAL THING.

After supper it's time for Vivaldi to go home. She lives at Four Winds, which is a six-and-a-half-minute walk from our house. Normally I'd walk her halfway home, then turn round and come back, but by the end of October it's dark after supper, so Mum gets my big brother, Jack, to be our bodyguard.

She has to ask several times because Jack has his earbuds in.



'Jack?'

~~Tsss, tsss,~~

'Would you walk Vivaldi home with Lily?'

~~Tss, tss, tsss, tss.~~

'I promised Vivaldi's mum that we'd get her home before eight.'

Tsss, tssss, tsss, tsstssstssst.

'Jack? Oh, for Pete's sake. JACK, TAKE THOSE THINGS OUT OF YOUR EARS AND JOIN THE HUMAN RACE, WOULD YOU?'

'What?' squawks Jack. He hauls out the earbuds and lets them dangle from his collar while he blinks up at Mum as if she's dragged him out of a deep coma. 'Keep your hair on, Mum. Honestly. What is your problem?'

Yikes. Jack is skating on thin ice here. Vivaldi and I pull faces at each other and try to make ourselves invisible. Fortunately Daisy saves the moment.

'Keep you hayon, Mumma,' she cackles, obviously delighted at the idea of Mum *not* keeping her hair on. 'Keep you hayon, Lil-Lil, keep you hayon, Dack—'

'All *right*, Daze, that's enough,' Mum

mutters, turning away to stack plates in the dishwasher.

Which is why she doesn't notice Jack's hair rising up to the ceiling and doing two laps of the lightshade before settling back down on its owner's head. Jack doesn't notice, either because

a) Jack never notices anything

b) his hair is so short it doesn't count

and c) he's got his earbuds back in.

