

**SARAH
MUSSI**

**Here be
Wizards**

**THE SNOWDONIA CHRONICLES
BOOK THREE**

Also by Sarah Mussi

The Door of No Return

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Here be Dragons (The Snowdonia Chronicles Book One)

Here be Witches (The Snowdonia Chronicles Book Two)

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Here Be Wizards
Sarah Mussi

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Dedication

*To Myrddin Emrys, Welshman,
Mage and Magician of All Time*

In local tradition, it is said that Carmarthen be a town that was built up around a sacred oak tree. It is said that that oak marketh the spot of the birthplace of the mythical magician Merlin and guardeth the place whereunder a portal opens unto Wales's magical realm of Annwyn. It is further claimed that the origin of the name Carmarthen, or Caerfyrddin, cometh from Myrddin, the Welsh name for Merlin Ambrosius, Myrddin Emrys.

It is said that Merlin hath made a prophecy regarding this ancient oak.

*'When Merlin's Oak shall tumble down,
Then shall fall Carmarthen's Town.
When Merlin's Oak be treated kind,
Then Heart's Desires ye shall find.'*

*From The Legends of Wales
Unknown*

THE PATHS
- of -
ANNWYN



AVALON

WILL-O'-THE-
WISP MARSHES

TWRCH TRWYTH TOR

UNICORN'S BLUFF

MERLIN'S GLADE

Here be Wizards



MERLIN'S OAK

RUN-TO CAVE

And so it begins ...

21 June

At the Witching Hour Upon the Eve of Midsummer

*The girl turns her face to the summit; above her the air shudders.
Heart pounding, blood hammering, she steels herself. 'I will do
this,' she mutters. 'I will have him or I will have my revenge.'*

Then she shouts:

'Imperium Magis!

Wild water roar!

Sky pour down thy stinking pitch!

Sea mount up in fury!

Dash all voyagers to bits!

Lightning strike, thunder bite!

*Perish all on rocks this night!
Fire find fire, blaze and burn!
As I now suffer, take your turn.
By darkest arts and deadly sin,
Let this unholy work begin.'*

High above her, a helicopter veers off course. Its lights plunge out. Steel grates and plastic melts. The engine falters. The pilot screams. Thunder roars. Out of nowhere, a wild wind blows. Ahead, the sheer face of Clogwyn D'ur Arddu appears. There is a sickening lurch. Rain slashes down.

The plummeting starts.

The shrieks of the people on board are drowned out in the tempest.

Act One

Midsummer's Eve

*'Here there be Wizards, wise and fair:
One tall and young with golden hair,
One old and bowed with many a care,
One cruel and wild: O Heart's Despair!
But looks deceive. Beware! Beware!'*

One

*I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round,
Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier.*

Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
by William Shakespeare

As if by instinct, I halt. Something's wrong. Flashes of light sear across the horizon. Then comes the boom of thunder.

I scan the slopes for cover. Another roll of thunder crashes out. The rocks tremble. I take stock: storm; lightning.

Not good.

I'm halfway up Snowdon and way too exposed. Do I turn back or carry on?

Don't get me wrong, I love a good summer storm. The

thrill of lightning; the fun of counting the seconds to see how far away the storm is; the crazy drum of thunder.

TBH, I love it better from the safety of my window seat, in our old farmhouse, all cuddled up with a hot chocolate. Not so much up here, high above the upper pastures. A target for any chance lightning strike.

Or not-so-chance.

Sigh. I'd really wanted to get up to the Devil's Bridge.

The storm rumbles closer. Definitely not good.

I mentally flick through the safety guidelines in the *Mountain Rescue Volunteer's Handbook* (AKA Mum's Bible):

Caught out on a mountain in a thunderstorm:

1. *Look for cover.*
2. *Avoid trees or large stony outcrops; instead head for cracks and crevices in natural rock faces.*
3. *Move to sheltered overhanging rocks and be sure the scree on the slopes above is not loose.*
4. *Failing finding cover, lie down flat and stay there until the storm has passed.*

The first fat splodge of rain hits my cheek. Lie down flat? In sheep poo? And prickly thistles? Really? You've got to be joking. I'll climb higher and search for cover.

But before I have time to move, the sky rips open. A spear of purple-blue, volcanic orange, then intense white slashes down. Lightning strikes the slope just metres above me, igniting a stunted hawthorn. *Flipping heck! That was close.*

No time for Plan A.

OK, you win, *MRV Handbook*.

I drop flat on to the turf. And my face lands on hard nobbles of sheep poo. Great. So much for a romantic visit up to the Devil's Bridge to tell Henry how much I love him. (DB is where we first kissed, so my utterly-best-ever dreamy-happy-place.)

I lie there thinking, the heat of the burning scrub above me, the rain pelting down. *That hawthorn was the tallest thing around here. So if I stand up, I'll be next.*

Still going up to the Devil's Bridge, Ellie? Get real.

Not Going To Happen.

Rubbing my cheek free of the sticky sheep poo, I roll over to see where the storm's coming from.

I shield my eyes from the battering rain and peer out.

In the distance, a blanket of white spreads across the sky. It's nowhere near dark yet. It never gets totally dark at midsummer up here. But a grey storm cloud is blowing in from the west. It blackens the sky, making it feel much later than it is. I glance at my phone: 6.47 p.m.

Something silver flickers in the rolling billows of cloud. Lights? They appear to be heading towards me, though they're mostly obscured. I tilt my head up and squint into the pouring rain. Something is speeding this way, quite fast. A plane? Helicopter, maybe? I sit up properly to get a better look. Whatever it is, it seriously needs to gain height. I go all goosebumpy. *Don't they know about the huge cliffs dead ahead?*

A sheet of cloud folds over the moving object. Its lights blink out. Engines stutter. A shiver runs through me. Whoever's up there is in trouble.

Trouble!

A sixth sense sends tingles through my skull.

A dark bird swoops out of the sky, trilling out a note of alarm.

Danger!

Instinctively I roll sideways and drop back to flat. There's a crackle of static. A flash of light, then an almost instantaneous boom. My heartbeat shoots into overdrive. FLIPPING HELL! The mountain seems to shake. Rain *waterfalls* down, totally drenching me.

An outcrop of stone just above me splits in two! SPLITS IN TWO! A boulder crashes down, right where I was lying.

Oh my God.

That was just centimetres away. I could have been smashed to bits!

I throw my head back and breathe. *My ears! The noise!*
That was louder than a bomb going off.

I was lying right there!

My legs tremble. My insides are squishy jelly.

I could have been splattered!

I glance up and get hit square in the eye by a massive raindrop.

There are more stones up there. I must move. NOW.
I roll on to my tummy and start to squirm away. My legs are so shaky, they hardly work.

That rockfall ripped a gash right down the mountain.

Thank God I rolled away!

I think fast. *Lightning strike, boulder crashing down, dark bird swooping. All those things are weird. Something's up.*

Something weird.

I stop crawling and sniff the air. Rain, earth and ... what's that smell? *Magicke?*

Surely not?

I mentally check through the requirements for *magicke*.

Water. Rain. (Splating me in the eye.)

Fire. Lightning. (Setting fire to random hawthorn bushes.)

Earth. Rocks. (Tumbling. Squishing. We won't go there.)

And the racing air.

Could be magicke, then.

Oh my God! I'm out on Midsummer's Eve and there's magicke about.

Definitely not so good.

Stay calm, Ellie.

I seriously need to get out of here. I check the skies again. It's magicke all right. Maybe I can make a run for it back down the mountain ... Another rumble of thunder dies away. The struggling cough of an engine takes its place. I look up. The silver flickering is visible again, speeding much closer. It is a helicopter, and it is in trouble. It's way too low. It's going to crash. *Oh my God, this is the kind of thing that happens when there's bad magicke about.*

'WATCH OUT!' I scream. 'FOR GOD'S SAKE, TURN BACK!'

Poor visibility. Torrential rain. Rolling clouds.

Ancient Magicke.

And the evil Black Cliff of Clogwyn dead ahead.

Just waiting for a blood sacrifice.

Two

I want to stand up and wave my arms around, signal the pilot to turn back. But I'm stuck flat on the ground getting drenched. Some evil power is guiding the magicke. Must be. And I'm a target too. If I try to interfere, it'll totally come for me. So how can I warn them? I wish I had a radio. I pull out my mobile.

No coverage.

One text (from earlier).

George

You about, Elles? Fancy a magical evening together?

Great!

George never misses a trick to let me know he's available. (His is a very long sad story of unrequited love. Mine is not.)

I pull off my high-visibility vest. Since my experience last winter, my mum insists I wear one when I'm out alone on Snowdon.¹ I know, don't say a thing. Anyway, apparently, like with whales, you can see high-vis vests from outer space. Now I'm grateful for mine. I quickly slip out of the sleeve holes and wave it above my head.

If it wasn't so serious, I'd laugh my head off. Like, who is that weirdo lying on a sopping wet, sheep-pooey hillside waving a high-vis thingy about? Ha ha. Ignore it.

But it's the best I can do, because I haven't got a flare.

Never Go Out Without a Flare. That's another of Mum's rules.

Note to self: since Mum is a trained Search and Rescue Volunteer, DO WHAT SHE SAYS.

But I was only going up to watch the sun not-setting on the longest day of the year ... and the evening was bright ... and the sky was blue ... and love was in the air ... and I wanted to feel near to Henry ... in our special place.

How the heck was I supposed to know I'd need a flare?

I should have known better. Here on Snowdon, weather conditions can change in the blink of an eye. Being out late without any emergency stuff is stupid.

1. You can read all about it in my story *Here be Dragons*, but basically I went out in a snowstorm and my mobile went dead. Fabulous. I nearly died – BUT that's how I met Henry, LOVE OF MY LIFE and part-time dragon. No, correction: part-time gorgeous handsome amazing boy (LOVE OF MY LIFE) and most-time dragon.

And just to underline that point for me, the storm really gets going. The temperature plummets. Icy hail bullets down. Like tiny daggers, it stabs my skin. I cover my face with my hands. Thunder shakes the mountain. Sheets of lightning, tridents of jagged energy and buckets of rain slash downwards. All over me. Soaking wet. Wonderful.

The silhouette of Snowdon flashes bright and blinks out.

And the helicopter keeps on going – straight at the cliff face.

I shield my eyes. I try to listen to the engines, praying they'll make it. But everything's drowned out in thunder. I peer upwards, trying to locate the helicopter. I can't make out anything except lightning.

Then there it is!

It lurches out of the skies and down towards the mountainside. It's trying to gain height before it reaches Clogwyn, but instead it's losing power.² I hold my breath. I bite my cheek. *It hasn't a hope in hell.*

I hate Clogwyn. Its cliffs are so deceptively high; its darkness swallows everything. *Why don't they try to land?* They say the King of the Underworld, Gwyn ap Nudd, created Clogwyn to tempt climbers to try their strength. And fail. And die. And then he drinks their blood and chases them into the Otherworld. Nasty guy.

2. Clogwyn is Clogwyn Du'r Arddu, or the Black Cliff of the Darkness.

The air smells thick with evil right now: dank wet herbage and burning hawthorn. Another burst of thunder rolls across the range. The evening shakes. A fork of lightning outlines the helicopter against the darkness of the cliff.

I press the palms of my hands into my eye sockets. In the blackout behind my hands, I still see the after-print of the flash.

Please don't let the helicopter crash. Please, dear Snowdon, please.

Scared to look, yet knowing I must remember every detail, pinpoint the exact crash site, anything to help, I peek out.

For one moment, I see clearly: the helicopter lit up in a halo of blue light. In that space of silence before the thunder comes, I hear the engine finally falter and cut. The blades flicker and the helicopter descends straight into the shadow of Clogwyn.

The rocks ring out in horrific triumph.

And a burst of volcanic orange erupts into the darkness.



As suddenly as the storm starts, it stops.

An eerie stillness descends. Everywhere's gone gloomy.

I sit up. I scan the slopes. All is desolate. I shiver inside my wet clothes. I pull out my phone again. Battery life's OK, but still no coverage. I reread George's text. I wish he was here. No way to text him.

A helicopter has just crashed into the cliffs. I must get help.

No one can have possibly survived. *But what if someone has? What if they need emergency life-saving first aid?* I'm a trained volunteer mountain-rescue first-aider. I must race up the mountain and help them myself.

I've no idea how I can help. They may be really, really, *really* badly injured.

But I'm the only one who knows they've crashed. Possibly.

I do a quick mental calculation: how long will it take me to get to George's cottage? A good forty minutes. How long will it take me to get up to Clogwyn? Only fifteen. I check the sky. Let's hope the storm is over.

I start running uphill.

Ha ha. The storm immediately picks up.

Rain slices down. Lightning strikes out. Oh God. I duck. One bolt – just behind me. *Breathe in. Jeez, that was close. Just let me get to the crash site. Please, Snowdon.*

As I run, I pray and I make a plan. *I'll administer any kind of help I can. Henry, please protect me. I'll take photos if*

my battery lasts. Mighty Snowdon, hear my prayer. I'll record details. Then I'll head to George's place. Please, universe, give me a break.

My sides ache. I hope the crash won't be too terrible. *Not burning bodies. Run. Get there and assess the situation. You can report to emergency teams then.*

But what about the magicke?

My lungs burn. A lightning bolt stabs through the darkness. My breath cuts short. A shrub in front of me crackles into flame. I fling myself sideways. I cough. The air smells of bleach and smoke. *Breathe.* I send *another* prayer up to Snowdon. *Please, please, please protect me.* I get back up on my feet. I run up the mountain again, spluttering.

A mountain that reeks of magicke.

A mountain covered in treacherous boulders.

In a crazy evil storm. Brilliant.

Inspirational.

I am tearing through bracken, hurtling as fast as I can towards a dangerous, awful, hideous crash site, where I'm probably going to be able to do absolutely zero, except get myself struck by lightning. *Are you nuts?* a small voice says. *This is madness. Turn back while you can.* But no, it's as if I've been caught in some malignant force field. I can't – even if I wanted to.

I pull my phone out of my pocket again. There might be a bit of coverage higher up. Snowdon is tricky. You might get a signal on one spot and absolutely zilch a metre away. I keep one eye on the coverage bar, the other on the terrain in front of me. Running across a mountainside is tricky too. The last thing I need is to fall and twist an ankle.

I glance from the phone to the sky. Lightning alert! I drop flat, just in case. I wait until the lightning strikes somewhere else. As you do. Then I'm up and racing on again.

And I run as I've never run before.

I fling myself through furze and heather, plunging up the slopes.

Ahead another ball of fire explodes. The mountain rings with a sharp terrible booming.

What the heck was that?

I pause. Check. Pant. Listen. The wind's right at my back, fierce, howling. Up ahead, Clogwyn is lit in angry flames.

Go.

I weave in between boulders – zigzag, leap, twist. Sloshing my wet, wet clothes.

What if the helicopter has totally exploded and set everything on fire?

Can magical hellfire melt stone?

A wailing, shrieking sound tears past me. *Christ, what was that?*

The only way to reach the crash site is to cross the next slope and make it to Clogwyn by the left side of the llyn.

I topple a pile of rocks, kick on turf. My lungs can't take this. No clean air. That sickly smell of magicke. Chlorine and bleach and frankincense.

A pain in my side stabs deep. *Keep going.* Gasping, coughing, chest burning.

Just make it there and see what can be done.

I slip. I'm so wet. I fling my arms out in front of me. I hit the mountainside, keep tumbling forward.

Lightning zaps overhead and strikes the spot I'd been on just before I fell.

Holy crap.

Snowdon, thank you. Thank you.

Then through the darkness, I see it. About thirty metres above me to my right, a high black-sided cliff standing out against the sky.

Clogwyn Du'r Arddu.

Nearly there.

I splash through swamp. *So cold.* Water slops over the tops of my shoes. *Ignore it. You're soaked anyway.* I flounder

uphill. *Go diagonally across the mountain; make for the bottom of the cliff.* Grey slate. Dark sky.

Wildfire.

And the boom of thunder.