

Castle NEVERMORE

Ruth Morgan

Characters

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Gethin – a young traveller

Betsan – An old woman

A Guard

A Cook

A Doctor

The Lord Pedr

Mair – a young Victorian girl

Tegid – a Wizard

SCENE 1: ON THE HILLSIDE

NARRATOR 1: One bright Saint David's Day morning, a young lad named Gethin was strolling in the hills in the middle of Wales. He climbed onto a large stone, the better to enjoy the beautiful view. All of a sudden, a mighty rumble shook the ground beneath the stone.

Sound effect: a loud rumble, like thunder.

GETHIN: What in the name of Welsh cakes was that?

Sound effect: an enormous rush of wind.

NARRATOR 2: Then poor Gethin was thrown into the air by a torrent of wind which blasted from the earth. It catapulted the stone just as though it were the stopper in a bottle of fizzy pop. When Gethin landed, he was in deep shadow.

GETHIN: Help! What's happening?

NARRATOR 1: Gethin staggered to his feet only to find himself standing in the courtyard of a mighty castle, its high walls capped by towers and turrets.

NARRATOR 2: The floor of the courtyard was covered in snow. The air was icy cold, even though Gethin could still see the warm blue sky smiling overhead.

GETHIN: Brrr! It's f . . . f . . . f . . . freezing in here.

Enter an old woman, carrying a bundle of sticks. Gethin doesn't see her yet.

GETHIN: What is this place? Am I dreaming? Maybe I hit my head when I fell.

The Old Woman drops her bundle in surprise.

OLD WOMAN: Who are you? Has the Wizard Llwyd sent you? Have you come to help us, or . . . or . . . ?

The old woman shrieks and runs away, waving her arms wildly above her head.

GETHIN: Come back! That was weird. Why was she so scared of me? Well, I'm not hanging around where I'm not wanted. I'm off!

Gethin walks over to the open gateway. As he does so, the portcullis begins to lower.

GETHIN: Hey!

As Gethin arrives at the gateway, the portcullis clangs shut against the ground. He beats at the portcullis with his hands.

GETHIN: Ow! It's made of ice!

Gethin places one finger on the portcullis, then pulls it away sharply and sucks it.

GETHIN: Ice frozen so hard it burns!

Enter the Old Woman, a Guard, a Cook and a Doctor, all dressed in medieval clothes.

OLD WOMAN: That's him! He came from nowhere. Llwyd must have sent him.

GUARD: Right, you. Tell us, have you come to help us solve the puzzle?

COOK: Please say you've come to free us from this prison.

GETHIN: I don't know what you're talking about!

GUARD: Llwyd hasn't sent you?

GETHIN: I don't know any Llwyd. Now, pull up that portcullis and let me go!

DOCTOR: You really don't know where you are?

GETHIN: I swear! One minute I'm standing enjoying the view; the next I'm flying through the air, then I land in this dreadful place.

DOCTOR: Then heaven help you, you poor lad. You'd better come with us.

Exit Gethin and the courtiers

SCENE 2: THE GREAT HALL

The Lord Pedr is sitting on his throne, surrounded by sombre-looking courtiers including the Old Woman, Guard, Cook and Doctor. Gethin stands before them.

To one side of the throne is an ornate wooden chest.

DOCTOR: Your Lordship, he swears he is not from Llwyd and I believe him.

LORD PEDR: Indeed?

GETHIN: Will someone tell me how I can get out of here?

LORD PEDR: Well, if we could tell you that, we wouldn't be here ourselves.

GETHIN: What do you mean?

LORD PEDR: *[ignoring Gethin]* Betsan, have you stacked the firewood at the gate?

OLD WOMAN: I have, My Lord.

DOCTOR: Although I don't see . . .

LORD PEDR: *[shouting]* What? What don't you see?

DOCTOR: We try to melt the portcullis each year. It never works. The hotter the fire gets, the more the ice seems to thicken.

LORD PEDR: Well, when you come up with a better idea, just let me know, you scoundrel. We'll light the fire as usual.

GETHIN: Excuse me . . .

LORD PEDR: Silence, you!

COOK: What about the chest, My Lord?

LORD PEDR: Tegid has come up with a new spell, but we need to be out in the open air. Come, there's no time to waste. Guard, bring the chest.

Exit the Lord Pedr, followed by the Guard carrying the chest, and the other courtiers. The only ones left in the Hall are Gethin and a girl called Mair who is dressed in Victorian clothes.

MAIR: It happened to me, too.

GETHIN: You mean . . .

MAIR: It was Saint David's Day, 1897. I was out for a walk and, like you, became imprisoned here. My name is Mair.

GETHIN: But what is this place?

MAIR: Castle Nevermore. It only exists on one day a year, the first of March. So we creep inch by inch through our lives, living one day each year, miserable in the knowledge that there's no escape.

GETHIN: Where are you the rest of the year?

Mair simply points at the ground and pulls a grim face.

GETHIN: But that's horrific! How did it all happen? And why is there no escape?

MAIR: Pedr is a cruel Lord, and a foolish one. He made the mistake of trying to double-cross a powerful Wizard.

GETHIN: Llwyd?

MAIR: That's right. Llwyd accused Pedr of not valuing the most important things in life. He said he would turn this castle into a reflection of Pedr's mean soul.

GETHIN: A frozen prison . . .

MAIR: But he left a puzzle, a single way out. If someone can only solve it, the spell will break and we shall all be free.

GETHIN: What is it?

MAIR: If anyone can turn whatever is in that chest to gold, the icy portcullis will melt. The trouble is, no-one knows how to do it. Pedr's own Wizard, Tegid, is always trying . . . and failing.

GETHIN: So what's in the chest?

MAIR: I don't know.

GETHIN: Well, I have to know. Come on, which way were they going?

MAIR: Outside. Believe me: they can't have gone far.

Exit Gethin and Mair.

SCENE 3: THE COURTYARD

Lord Pedr and his courtiers are gathered around the closed chest.

Gethin rushes into the courtyard, followed by Mair.

GETHIN: I must see what's in the chest.

LORD PEDR: Seize him!

The Guard steps forward and pins Gethin's arms behind his back.

LORD PEDR: The fire has been lit?

OLD WOMAN: Yes, although it doesn't seem to be making much difference. The ice seems thicker than ever.

LORD PEDR: Where is that fool Tegid? Time's running out.

Enter Tegid

TEGID: Here I am, My Lord.

LORD PEDR: This new spell of yours, it had better work.

TEGID: I'm confident it'll work this time. I'll turn the contents of the chest to precious gold before your very eyes.

LORD PEDR: Just get on with it!

The Guard and Cook step forward and open the lid of the chest.

*Tegid circles the chest three times, dropping pinches of powder
into the chest as he chants.*

TEGID: *[chanting]* Turn, turn to glittering gold,
That all of us may here behold.
This Saint David's Day we'll see
Pedr rescued, rich and free!

Lord Pedr and the courtiers creep forward to peer inside the chest.

LORD PEDR: *[angrily]* It's made no difference! You'll pay for this, Tegid.

*The courtiers groan. Gethin manages to struggle free of the Guard and pushes through the
crowd.*

GETHIN: Let me see what's in there!

*Gethin grabs one side of the chest and the Cook grabs the other. There is a struggle, which
ends in a pile of daffodil bulbs spilling out onto the floor.*

TEGID: Stop him!

Gethin picks up a bulb.

GETHIN: But I know what to do! I know how to change these into gold!

DOCTOR: Then show us, lad.

*Gethin kneels and begins planting the bulbs in the earth,
digging with his hands.*

TEGID: My Lord, this is madness!

GETHIN: But if I'm right, and the Wizard gave you magic bulbs . . .

Sound effect: magical 'growing' music. Golden daffodils appear from the earth. The courtiers gasp.

MAIR: Beautiful golden daffodils!

GETHIN: But of course you were expecting the other kind of gold, Pedr.

The Old Woman points in the direction of the gates.

OLD WOMAN: Look! The portcullis has melted! We're free!

All the courtiers rush to the gates and exit.

The only ones left are Lord Pedr, Gethin and Mair.

LORD PEDR: *[shouting]* Come back, I command you. You'll only leave when I say so. I'm still your Lord and Master.

MAIR: It's too late. They've gone.

GETHIN: And nowadays, there aren't any Lords ruling the castles. You're out of a job, Pedr. There's no-one left for you to bully. It seems that the Wizard Llwyd has had his perfect revenge.

Exit Lord Pedr, his head bowed.

MAIR: I'm scared. I don't know anything about your world.

GETHIN: Well, it's a place where we still celebrate Saint David's Day. Come with me and I'll show you!

Exit Gethin and Mair.

NARRATOR 1: Gethin and Mair stepped out onto a bright hillside where every dancing daffodil seemed to promise a golden future.

NARRATOR 2: And as for Castle Nevermore . . . it was never seen again.