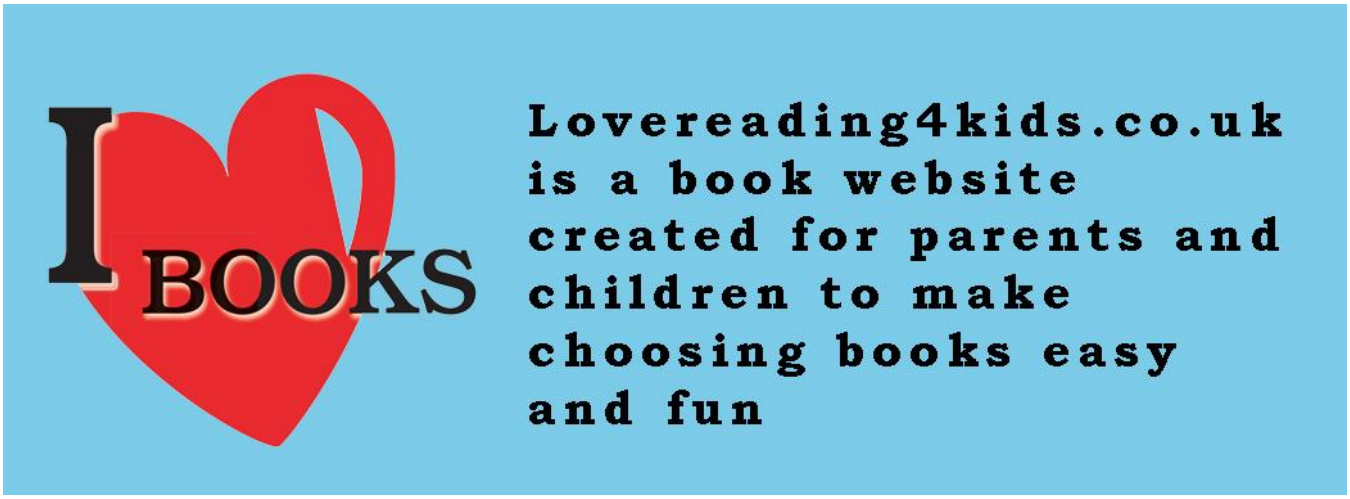


Opening extract from

Beginner's Guide to Curses Spellchasers

Written by

Lari Don

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For Colin

Thank you for all those cold, wet, muddy trips
to Dufftown and the Cabrach

(And for everything else you do that
makes my writing possible.)

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Chapter One

The moment Molly heard the dog growl behind her, she dropped to the ground, low and crouching.

Her world grew wider. She could see almost the whole way round the playing fields without moving her head.

She looked down and saw fur.

On her hands.

Only they weren't hands. They were long brown paws. She twitched. The paws twitched under her.

Oh no, she thought. Not again.

Then she heard the dog louder and closer. Above her, she saw black slavering jaws open wide, yellow teeth ready to snap her spine.

So Molly ran. She ran swift and straight, right across the playing fields. Running faster than she ever thought she could. She had no idea how she was running like this. This incredible fast leaping flight, feet barely touching the ground.

The dog sprinted after her, barking its determination to catch her and rip her and kill her.

Molly ran faster. But the dog was close behind and the hedge at the edge of the playing fields was a long way off.

She was running on instinct. Running because she was being chased. Running because it felt like the right thing to do, with these legs, and this blood pumping through her veins.

But she had no idea what to do next. Would the dog get tired before her? Could she escape if she just kept running?

Then she felt the dog's hot breath on her tail.

Without thinking, Molly switched direction. She leapt to one side and started running parallel to the hedge, away from the straight-line course the dog was struggling to alter.

Her legs had done that. Not her head.

She'd escaped the dog for a moment, but now she wasn't running towards the safety of the hedge.

Molly could see the whole park, all the way around, apart from a narrow blind spot right in front of her nose and another blind spot directly behind her. Her wide field of vision showed the black-and-white hunter hurtling towards her again.

So she ran at amazing grass-skimming speed, dodging towards the hedge, then away, then towards the hedge again.

The dog howled in frustration behind her.

She sprinted and jumped, until at last she reached the hedge and ducked under its lowest branches.



On the other side, Molly tumbled to the ground, landing on her knees and ripping her jeans open.

She gulped a lungful of cold autumn air, glanced at her trembling hands to check they were pale skin, not brown fur, then stood up and looked over the hedge.

A black-and-white greyhound was panting and grinning up at her. Molly gasped and stepped back.

"Oy! Linford!" The man running up behind the dog was red-faced and waving a lead. "Don't worry about him, he won't hurt you. He's had his exercise for today, haven't you, Linford? Did you see them? Did you see how fast they ran?"

"No," said Molly. "Who was running fast?"

"He was chasing a hare! A beautiful long-legged brown hare."

"A hare?"

"Aye, a hare. Like a rabbit but bigger, stronger, smarter and much faster. And it only just got away. Greyhounds were bred to catch hares, and I bet you'd have caught her, yes you would," he rubbed his dog's ears, "you'd have caught her if you'd had a longer run at her."

He smiled at Molly, clipped the lead on the dog's collar and walked off.

"A hare," said Molly again.

So that's what she was. A hare…

