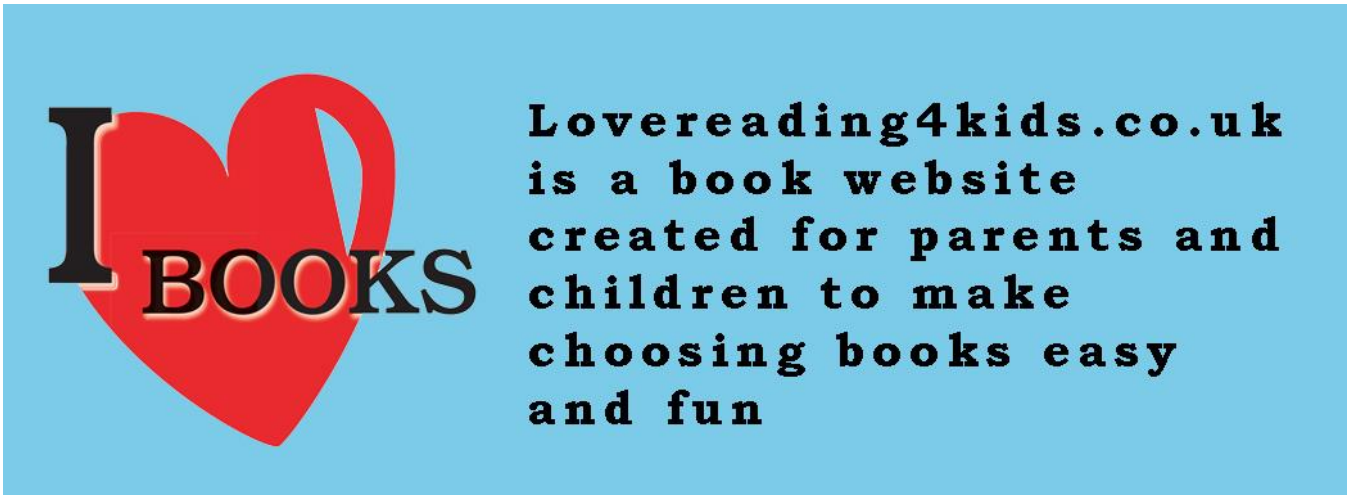


Opening extract from

Wed Wabbit

Written by

Lissa Evans

Published by

David Fickling Books

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Lovereading4kids.co.uk

To Martha and Nell and Stephen,
who read Wed Wabbit *first.*

Wed Wabbit
is a
DAVID FICKLING BOOK

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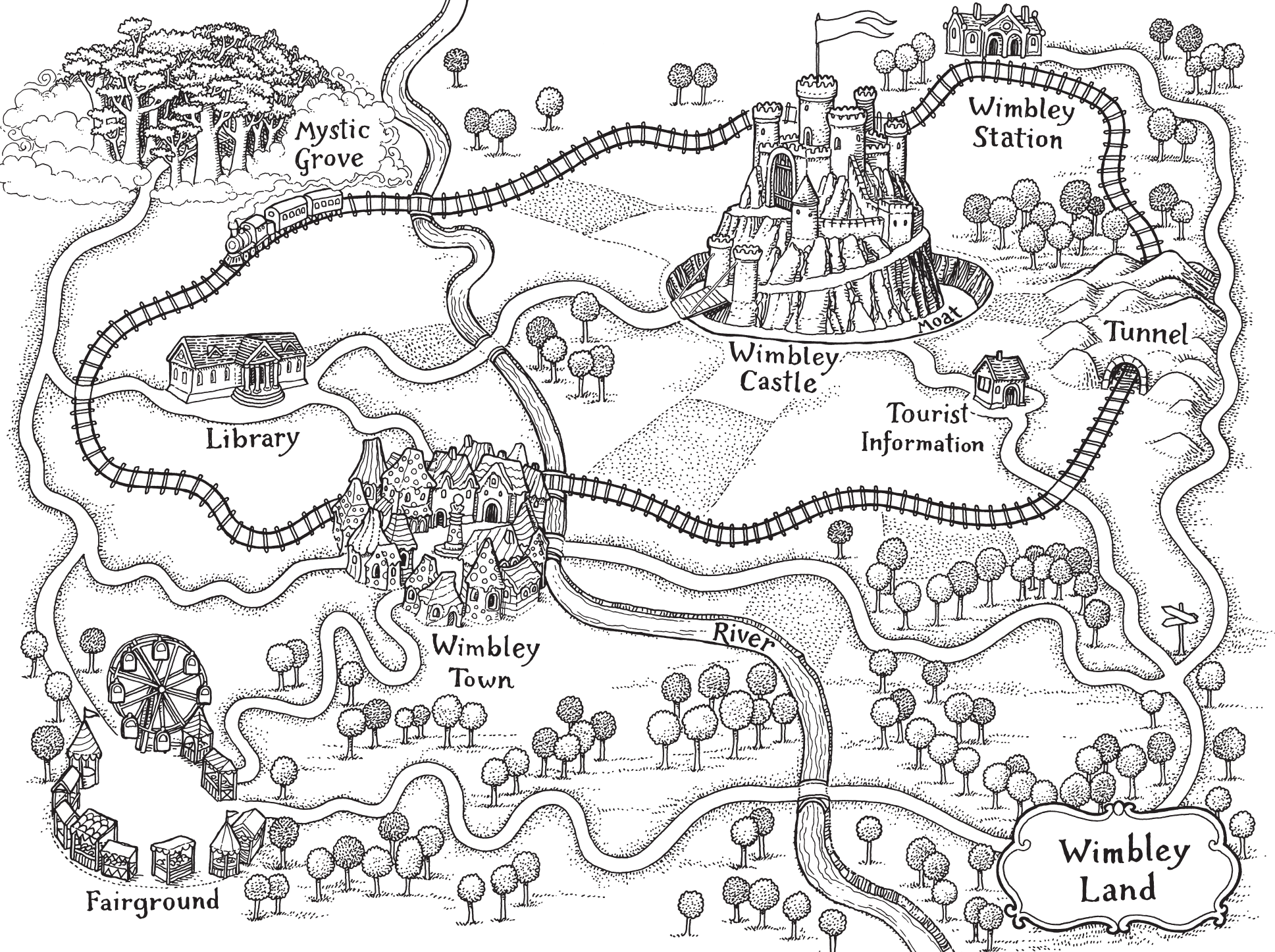
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WED WABBIT

LISSA EVANS



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Mystic Grove
Wimbley Station
Moat
Wimbley Castle
Tunnel
Library
Tourist Information
River
Wimbley Town
Fairground
Wimbley Land

ONE

It was such an ordinary evening, but every detail of it would matter; every detail would become *vital*.

'Wimbley Woos,' Minnie was wailing from her side of the bedroom. 'Wead me Wimbley Woos!'

'In a minute,' said Fidge. 'You're supposed to be drinking your milk.'

'But it's all warm and it's got a skin on top and it's *wevolting*.'

'All right, I won't be long.'

Fidge was packing. In just under thirty-six hours, her mother, her sister (aged four) and herself (aged ten and a half) were due to go on what was likely to be their best holiday for years and she wanted to be ready. She also wanted to try out a high-density packing technique she'd seen on

a programme about mountaineers. What you did was roll up each item of clothing into an incredibly tight sausage, secured with an elastic band; you then fitted the sausages in next to each other, like a bundle of sticks. Fidge was going to attempt to put her entire holiday wardrobe into the very small backpack she used for school lunches. This was partly because she liked a challenge, and partly because she knew that her mother's luggage would (as usual) consist of a huge assortment of random bags, while Minnie never went anywhere without an armful of toys, which she then dropped at five-second intervals. *Somebody* had to have both arms free for emergencies.

'Wead me Wimbley Woos. Pleeeeeeease.'

'Not Wimbley Woos *again*. Ask Mum.'

'Sorry, Fidge, I can't,' called her mother from the living room, 'I've got to finish making this hat by tomorrow morning, it's for a bride's mother and she's terribly fussy.'

Fidge groaned and got to her feet.

Her sister's side of the room was spectacularly untidy. As Fidge picked her way across to the bed there was a loud squeak.

'Don't twead on Eleanor!' screamed Minnie.

'Well, don't leave her lying on the floor,' said Fidge, irritably. She stooped to pick up Eleanor, who was a purple elephant with a pink skirt, huge long pink eyelashes and a pink fluffy hair-do.

'She's asleep,' said Minnie. 'Wed Wabbit made them all go to bed early because they'd been naughty.'

'Oh.' Fidge looked down and realized that the teddies and dolls had been arranged in long rows, as if in a dormitory. Even the dolls' buggy was lying on its side, covered with a blanket; next to it, a silver bus with pink wheels had a little pillow under its front bumper. As usual, only Wed Wabbit was in bed with Minnie.

'OK,' sighed Fidge, sitting on the bed and plopping the elephant down beside her. 'You sure you want this book? We must have read it eight million times.'

'I want it.'

'How about I just read two pages?'

'No.'

'Five pages?'

'Mum! Fidge is being mean!'

'*Please* Fidge, just read her the whole book, it's not that long,' called their mother, sounding weary.

Fidge pulled a face, opened *The Land of Wimbley Woos* and started to read the horribly familiar lines.

'In Wimbley Land live Wimbley Woos
Who come in many different hues
In Yellow, Pink and Green and Blue
In Orange, Grey and Purple too.'

The first picture showed a group of happy-looking Wimblies. Each was a different colour, but they were all shaped like dustbins with large round eyes and short arms and legs, and

they radiated a sort of idiotic jollity. Fidge turned the page and continued reading in a bored, rapid mutter.

'Yellow are timid, Blue are strong
Grey are wise and rarely wrong
Green are daring, Pink give cuddles
Orange are silly and get in muddles.
Purple Wimblies understand
The past and future of our land.'

'Wead it pwoply, with *expwession,'* commanded Minnie, who could almost certainly pronounce the letter 'r' if she really tried, but who was too used to people going 'ohhhhhhh, how cuuuuuuuute' whenever she spoke, to want to make the effort.

Fidge carried on reading, with a fraction more feeling.

'Many talents make a team
So Wimbley Woos can build their dream
By sharing skills, plans, gifts and arts
And caring for each other's farts.*'*

'It's not "farts"!' shouted Minnie, outraged. 'It's *"caring for each other's* HEARTS".'

'If you know it that well then you don't need me to read it to you, do you?'

'But Wed Wabbit wants to hear it too.'

'Does he?' Fidge looked at Wed Wabbit, who was sitting

next to Minnie. He was very large and made of maroon velvet, with huge stiff ears, long, drooping arms and legs and tiny black eyes. He was her sister's favourite toy, bought from a charity shop two and a half years ago, just a week after their father died. Minnie had spotted the rabbit in the shop window and had darted in and wrapped her arms round him and hadn't let go. He'd been her favourite toy ever since, but perhaps because the awfulness of that week still sat like a weight on Fidge's head, she'd never liked Wed Wabbit. Most soft toys (in Fidge's experience) looked either smiley or sad, but Wed Wabbit had a horribly smug expression, like a clever child who knows he's the teacher's favourite and never, ever gets told off. She avoided his gaze and turned the page to an illustration of a group of Wimbley Woos scratching their heads.

'Oh, here's the bit where they try to think of a birthday present for the King of the Wimblies,' she said, with fake excitement. 'I wonder what they'll come up with? Dinner for two at a top sushi restaurant? A personalized number plate?'

'Wead it to me.'

'A spa weekend?'

'Please,' said Minnie, placing a small hand on Fidge's arm. '*Please* wead my book.'

And because Minnie (when she wasn't showing off, or being annoying or screechy or whiny) was really quite sweet, Fidge stopped mucking around and read the whole of it.

For the eight millionth time.

Over the course of twenty irritating pages the Wimbley

Woos organized a huge game of hide and seek as their surprise gift for the King, had a big celebration picnic, and sang their deeply soppy Wimbley Woo song as the sun set behind the lollipop-shaped trees of Wimbley Land.

'Wimbley Woo! Wimbley Woo!
Pink and Green and Grey and Blue
Yellow and Orange and Purple too
A rainbow of sharing in all we do!'

Fidge turned the page and looked at the last picture. It showed a mixed crowd of Wimblies standing on a hill looking up at the moon. At some point, Minnie had drawn a moustache on all the purple ones.

Minnie herself was almost asleep. Fidge tucked her in, slid the book onto the cluttered bedside table and then snatched it up again; amongst the junk was a small carton of juice and it was now on its side, and a pool of orange was spreading over the table top. Hastily, Fidge picked up the carton and then looked around for something to blot the juice with. Wed Wabbit seemed to catch her eye, his smirk as infuriating as ever, and before she knew what she was doing, she'd grabbed him by the ears and was pressing him down onto the spill. The effect was miraculous: Wed Wabbit acted like a huge sponge. The pool shrank steadily and then disappeared without trace, the orange making no stain at all on the dark-red velvet. Fidge, feeling relieved but a bit guilty, checked that Minnie was definitely asleep, and then sat Wed Wabbit on the radiator and went back to her packing.

They were going on an outdoor activities holiday. Her mother and Minnie were going to potter round and play in the children's pool and Fidge was going to learn how to canoe, dive, abseil, climb, navigate, pot-hole and go-cart. She took an old T-shirt from the drawer and began to roll it very, very tightly. She had to leave enough space for the flippers her mother had promised to buy her.

It wasn't until the next afternoon that the terrible thing happened.

TWO

Fidge looked like her dad. In old photographs, you could see the family divide: Mum and Minnie were both fair and curly-haired and round-faced, while Fidge and her dad were dark and straight-haired and angular. 'Two balls of wool and two lengths of string' was how he'd always described the four of them. He'd been funny and practical, the sort of person who always planned ahead, checked maps, wrote lists, tested equipment, kept spares, mended punctures, oiled hinges and read instructions. 'String holds things together and keeps them neat and organized,' he'd said. When Mum had wanted to name her daughters after figures from Greek and Roman mythology, he'd agreed, as long as he could give them short, sensible nicknames.

So 'Iphigenia' had become 'Fidge' and 'Minerva' had become 'Minnie'.

He'd been a fireman, and as strong as a carthorse before he got ill.

Minnie couldn't really remember him, though she pretended she could; Fidge had been eight when he died, and she remembered him all the time. And as the only piece of string left in the family, she tried to keep things neat and organized.

Which was why going shopping with her mother and Minnie was always so massively irritating.

'Ooh now,' said Mum, passing a fruit stall and then doubling back, 'wouldn't it be nice to have some strawberries for tea? They're selling off the last punnets cheap.'

'But we've still got to get Minnie's sandals,' said Fidge, 'and then my flippers, and you haven't even finished packing yet and we're going on holiday *tomorrow*.'

'Stwawbewwies!' shouted Minnie.

'Honestly, we'll only be five minutes,' said her mother, joining the queue.

Fidge rolled her eyes and looked at her list again:

Bread for sandwiches ✓
Nit comb (just in case) ✓
Sandals
Flippers

Only four items all together, but with Mum and Minnie's

usual lack of urgency, they'd bought at least nine other things and had taken all afternoon about it; both Mum and Fidge were laden with bags. Minnie wasn't carrying any shopping, but that's because she was already carrying Eleanor Elephant, Wed Wabbit and a toy mobile phone encrusted with plastic diamonds and twinkling with pink lights. When you pressed a button on the side of it – which Minnie did at least once a minute – it went:

NING NANG NINGETY NANG NINGETY NINGETY NANG

After the strawberries came the shoe shop, in which Minnie was so happy about her new sandals that she did a dance which made all the other customers say 'aaaah', and then they set off for the shop that stocked flippers. They were nearly there when Minnie screamed.

'Look!' she gasped, pointing at a bookshop window, and then galloping over to it and squashing her face against the glass. 'Wimbley Wooooooos.'

The whole window was filled with tiny plastic Wimblies on a fake grass landscape. A toy train dawdled on a circuit around them, a grey Wimbley waving from the back of it. At the centre of the display was propped a brand-new pop-up edition of *The Land of Wimbley Woos*.

'Oh,' said Minnie, in ecstasy, dropping Eleanor Elephant. Fidge picked it up, just as Minnie dropped her plastic phone. 'It's so lovely . . .' sighed Minnie.

They had to go in and buy the book, of course. And then Minnie refused to leave the shop window until the train had been round another ten times. So by the time they got to the flippers place, it was closed.

'Oh, Fidge,' said Mum, looking stricken. 'I'm so sorry, love, everything took longer than it ought to have done. I always do this, don't I?'

Fidge stood hunched, arms folded, trying to look unbothered. She'd found, over the past couple of years, that if she looked unbothered, then she generally felt unbothered, and if she *felt* unbothered then it didn't leave room for feeling other, more horrible things.

'Doesn't matter,' she muttered.

'I'm sure they'll sell them at the holiday centre.'

'OK.'

Her mother tried to give her a hug and then straightened up and smiled rather sadly. 'It's like cuddling a cardboard box,' she said. 'You're all corners.'

They set off again, Minnie chattering, trying to look at her new book as she walked, and Fidge lagging behind, not saying much. When Minnie dropped Wed Wabbit, and didn't notice, Fidge found herself giving him a bit of a kick along the pavement. He spun round and lay looking up at her, with his usual smug expression. And instead of stooping to pick him up, she booted him a second time. She'd only meant to give him a bit of a prod but it turned out to be the sort of kick that you could never do deliberately, however hard you