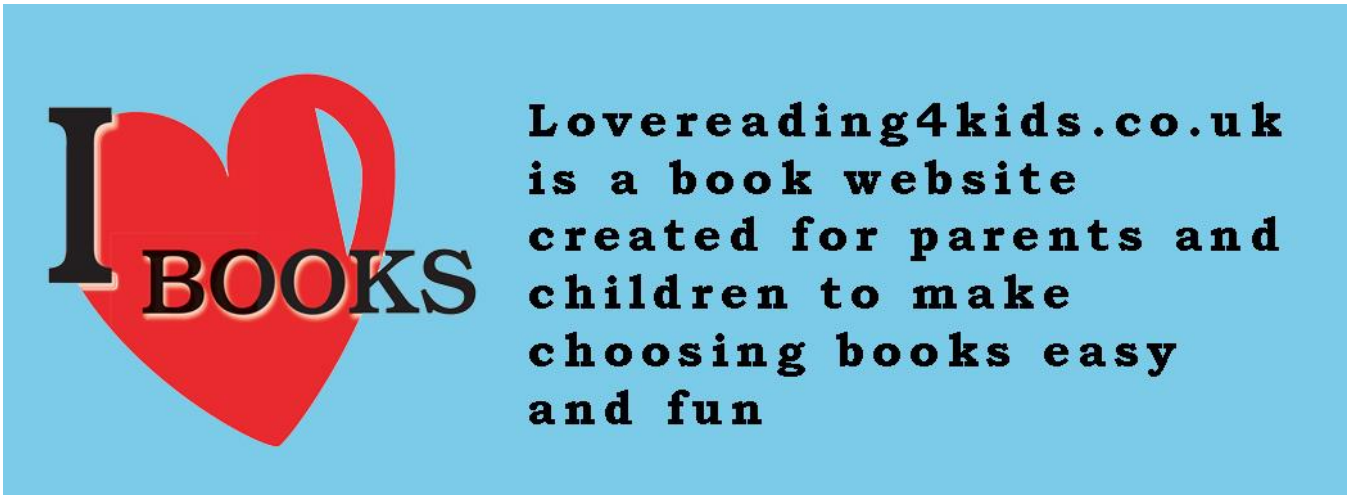


Opening extract from

Archie Greene and the Raven's Spell

Written by

D. D. Everest

Illustrated by

James de la Rue

Published by

Faber & Faber

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published in 2017
by Faber & Faber Limited
Bloomsbury House,
74–77 Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3DA

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY
Typeset by Faber & Faber Limited

All rights reserved
Text © D. D. Everest, 2017
Illustrations © James de la Rue, 2017

The right of D. D. Everest and James de la Rue to be identified
as author and illustrator of this work respectively has been
asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

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

ISBN 978–0–571–30964–1



2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

For Sara, Dan and Erin

1

Worms for Supper

Archie Greene stared into the gloomy room. The only light came from a solitary sunbeam that entered through a slit window. There was no furniture, just a pile of rags in one corner and a heavy iron chain.

A raven appeared at the window. For a moment it blocked out the light. Then it folded its wings and slipped through the narrow opening. The heap of rags moved and two eyes gleamed in the dark. A man was chained to the wall.

'Hello, my old friend,' he croaked. 'What have you brought me today?'

The raven opened its beak and a juicy fat worm fell onto the floor. The man seized it and hungrily gobbled it down.

'A banquet fit for a king,' he laughed, bitterly.

'Now I will tell you my story once more so that you may pass it on to your children and they to theirs. For one day, the ravens will carry the warning.'

The raven put its head on one side to listen. The man wheezed, and Archie could see that although a streak of white ran through his black hair, he was still a young man.

'There was once a foolish alchemist called Fabian Grey . . .' he began.

'Archie, wake up!' said Bramble Foxe. 'I only went to get another book and you're out for the count!'

For a moment Archie was disorientated. The aroma of old parchment filled his nostrils and he realised his cheek was resting on the open page of the book he'd been working on. He must have fallen asleep. He opened his eyes and found himself in the Scriptorium, the room at the Museum of Magical Miscellany set aside for writing magic.

Archie and Bramble were apprentices at the museum, where the world's most magical books were kept. The museum was hidden beneath the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

Bramble was holding a stack of books in her arms, but something wasn't quite right. Her face looked green. In fact, everything had a greeny tinge to it. Archie frowned. Then it dawned on

him that the Emerald Eye, the magical pendant given to him by the ghost of the magician John Dee, was lying on the open book in front of him so that he was looking at Bramble through it.

Relieved, he sat up and tucked the pendant back inside his shirt. The golden quill he used to write magic was lying on the desk. It must have slipped from his hand when he'd nodded off. He picked it up and felt a pulse of magical energy surge through it. It had once belonged to the seventeenth-century alchemist Fabian Grey, one of Archie's ancestors.

Archie was nearly thirteen, with mousey brown hair that stood up in a spike. At first glance he looked much like any other boy his age. The only real clue that there was anything magical about him was the colour of his eyes. One was green and the other was grey, a condition known as 'magician's eye'. He also had two tattoo-like marks on the palm of his right hand called firemarks, which denoted which magical apprenticeships he had begun. The first was in the shape of a needle and thread, the firemark he'd received when he started his apprenticeship as a magical bookbinder. The second firemark looked like a dragon swallowing its own tail and was even more rare because it meant that Archie was a magic writer.

Archie rubbed his eyes.

'Careful of that ink!' exclaimed Bramble,

indicating a crystal inkwell dangerously close to Archie's elbow. 'We haven't got much left.'

The ink contained a precious magical substance called azoth, which was used for writing spells, and was notoriously hard to make. Archie and his friends had managed to make some when they discovered a formula in Fabian Grey's notebook.

Bramble set down the books she was carrying. 'That's the second time you've fallen asleep this week. And we've got all of these to get through,' she added, indicating the pile of books.

Bramble was Archie's cousin and two years older than him. She flicked her long, dark hair over one shoulder and pointed at the clock on the wall. 'It's nearly eight o'clock, and I don't want to be late again tonight.'

Working at the museum was exciting but recently there'd been a lot of late nights. Archie yawned and stretched. These days he seemed to be tired all the time. It must be the long hours they'd been putting in at the Scriptorium.

Besides the two of them, there were three other apprentices who could write magic – Archie's younger cousin Thistle and their two friends Rupert Trevallen and Arabella Ripley. They called themselves the Alchemists' Club after Fabian Grey's original club. Lately, though, there had only been Archie, Bramble and Thistle.

'Arabella's back tomorrow, so that should help,' said Bramble. 'I hope she's had a nice time visiting Prague with her parents.'

'I really miss Rupert,' Archie sighed. 'At least we got a break when he was here.'

Until a month ago, Rupert had been working in the mythical menagerie in the Natural Magic Department of the museum. But as he was a bit older than the rest of the apprentices, he had now finished his training and was working at the Royal Society of Magic, in London. The Royal Society controlled all the magic in Britain, and it reported to the Magical League, the international magical authority. Archie himself didn't know much about the Royal Society except that it had a centuries-old reserve of precious azoth.

'How's Rupert getting on anyway?' asked Archie. He knew that Bramble kept in touch with him.

'He's working with Orpheus Gloom,' she said. Gloom was a magical assessor who had worked at the museum for a while. 'The Royal Society is experimenting with new ways to make more azoth using ingredients from magical creatures. Gloom chose Rupert because of his experience in the menagerie.'

'Who's taken over from him in the menagerie?' asked Archie.

'They haven't decided yet. Thistle applied for the job, but he's not sure he'll get it,' said Bramble. 'That reminds me,' she added. 'Edith Drew told me that there's some sort of problem with the magical creatures. Apparently a couple of snufflings have gone missing.'

Snufflings were small creatures that resembled guinea pigs and produced a magical enzyme that meant they could vanish if they sensed danger.

'How do they know they're missing?' asked Archie. 'They might just be hiding.'

'Snufflings disappear for a few seconds, not for entire weeks like these have,' said Bramble. 'And its not just the snufflings – some of the other creatures are getting sick. Simon the red-bellied salamander hasn't changed colour in weeks!'

Salamanders were distantly related to dragons and changed colour depending on their mood. Simon was temperamental and usually changed several times a day.

'Perhaps he's just feeling a bit washed out,' suggested Archie, hopefully.

Bramble shook her head. 'No, there's something wrong. He's got no appetite, and you know how dragons like their food. I think he might be pining for Rupert.'

Archie smiled to himself. Sometimes he still couldn't quite believe he was having these sorts of

conversations – talking about dragons and magical ink. His life hadn't always been so exciting.

He'd spent his first twelve years living quietly with his gran in a small seaside town after his parents and sister had disappeared while he was still a baby. But everything had changed for Archie the previous summer when he'd met his cousins and found out he was descended from the Flame Keepers of Alexandria, a secret community that guarded the Flame of Pharos, an ancient magical flame, and who were devoted to finding and preserving magical books.

When Archie had started his apprenticeship at the museum he'd discovered a rare ability that allowed him to talk to magical books. He had used his magical talents to thwart a plot to free an evil warlock called Barzak from *The Book of Souls,* one of the Terrible Tomes, the seven most dangerous magical books ever written.

Since then Archie had also had another exciting adventure involving another of the Terrible Tomes, *The Grim Grimoire*, which had cursed Fabian Grey and the original members of the Alchemists' Club. The lives of Archie and his newly formed Alchemists' Club companions were also in great danger until Archie had managed to defeat the *Grimoire* and lift the curse on his friends.

That was three months ago, and since then

the five of them had been practising their magic-writing skills. Now, under the supervision of Gideon Hawke, the head of Lost Books, but unbeknownst to the magical authorities, they had begun the task of rewriting the fading spells in the books in the museum.

Archie realised Bramble was looking at him quizzically. 'Anyway – when I came in you were mumbling something in your sleep. Bad dreams?'

Archie remembered his strange dream. 'I dreamed about Fabian Grey in the Tower of London,' he said, gazing at the golden quill in his hand.

Bramble raised her eyebrows. 'Him again!'

Grey had featured in Archie's dreams a lot lately. The alchemist had been imprisoned in the Tower after he'd accidently started the Great Fire of London with his magic.

Bramble looked thoughtful. 'I'm sure Grey's got something to do with whatever Dad is working on at the moment, too,' she said. 'I heard Mum mention him the other day when they were talking.'

Archie's uncle, Woodbine Foxe, worked as a finder, locating unidentified magical books. Woodbine spent most of his time scouring second-hand bookshops and following up leads. Occasionally the museum would send him

to collect a missing book. He had been very distracted lately and the children suspected he was on a secret mission.

Even though there was no one else in the room, Bramble dropped her voice to a low whisper. 'I'm pretty sure it's got something to do with the Greaders, too. Dad says they are getting bolder.'

Greaders were the sworn enemies of the Flame Keepers and had been behind the plot with *The Book of Souls* and *The Grim Grimoire*. In public, most Greaders appeared to be upstanding members of the magical community, but in secret, they practised dark magic and were greedy for the magic contained in the books. Archie had noticed that the museum elders seemed on edge. An increase in Greader activity would explain it. Bramble interrupted his thoughts.

'So what happened in your dream?'

'Grey was chained up in the Tower,' said Archie. 'He was talking to a raven.'

Bramble gave him a sharp look. 'Did the raven say anything?' she asked.

In their previous adventures with the Alchemist's Curse, a talking raven had delivered Fabian Grey's gold ring to Archie. The ring's secret was that it was really Grey's magic quill in disguise. Archie wore it on his finger whenever he wasn't using the quill to write magic.

‘No, it just brought him a worm to eat,’ Archie said, pulling a face in disgust at the thought. ‘But Grey said something about the ravens carrying a warning.’

‘Warning about what?’

Archie shrugged. ‘You woke me up before I could find out.’

‘Well, you can finish the dream tonight. We’ve got work to do now.’ She glanced at the open book on the desk. ‘What’s taking you so long anyway? You’re normally so fast and you’ve been working on that spell for hours.’

‘It’s finished,’ said Archie indignantly. ‘It’s right there.’ He glanced down at the spell he’d written. ‘Well, it was . . .’

A black flame had appeared on the page. As they watched, the carefully formed letters Archie had written ignited, twisting and distorting until there was nothing left but cinders. A single breath of foul air carried the ashes away, leaving only a dark scorch mark where the spell had been.

‘What on earth was that?’ said Bramble.

