Eldest of three sisters in a land where it is considered to be a misfortune, Sophie is resigned to her fate as a hat shop apprentice until a witch turns her into an old woman and she finds herself in the castle of the greatly feared wizard Howl.

Sophie has the great misfortune of being the eldest of three daughters, destined to fail miserably should she ever leave home to seek her fate. But when she unwillingly attracts the ire of the Witch of the Waste, Sophie finds herself under a horrid spell that transforms her into an old lady. Her only chance at breaking it lies in the ever-moving castle in the hills: the Wizard Howl's castle. To untangle the enchantment, Sophie must handle the heartless Howl, strike a bargain with a fire demon, and meet the Witch of the Waste head-on. Along the way, she...
Excerpt

In the land of Ingary, where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist, it is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three. Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes. Sophie Hatter was the eldest of three sisters. She was not even the child of a poor woodcutter, which might have given her some chance of success. Her parents were well to do and kept a ladies' hat shop in the prosperous town of Market Chipping. True, her own mother died when Sophie was two years old and her sister Lettie was one year old, and their father married his youngest shop assistant, a pretty blonde girl called Fanny. Fanny shortly gave birth to the third sister, Martha. This ought to have made Sophie and Lettie into Ugly Sisters, but in fact all three girls grew up very pretty indeed, though Lettie was the one everyone said was most beautiful. Fanny treated all three girls with the same kindness and did not favor Martha in the least. Mr. Hatter was proud of his three daughters and sent them all to the best school in town. Sophie was the most studious. She read a great deal, and very soon realized how little chance she had of an interesting future. It was a disappointment to her, but she was still happy enough, looking after her sisters and grooming Martha to seek her fortune when the time came. Since Fanny was always busy in the shop, Sophie was the one who looked after the younger two. There was a certain amount of screaming and hairpulling between those younger two. Lettie was by no means resigned to being the one who, next to Sophie, was bound to be the least successful. "It's not fair!" Lettie would shout. "Why should Martha have the best of it just because she was born the youngest? I shall marry a prince, so there!" To which Martha always retorted that she would end up disgustingly rich without having to marry anybody. Then Sophie would have to drag them apart and mend their clothes.

She was very deft with her needle. As time went on, she made clothes for her sisters too. There was one deep rose outfit she made for Lettie, the May Day before this story really starts, which Fanny said looked as if it had come from the most expensive shop in Kingsbury.

About this time everyone began talking of the Witch of the Waste again. It was said the Witch had threatened the life of the King's daughter and that the King had commanded his personal magician, Wizard Suliman, to go into the Waste and deal with the Witch. And it seemed that Wizard Stillman had not only failed to deal with the Witch: he had got himself killed by her. So when, a few months after that, a tall black castle suddenly appeared on the hills above Market Chipping, blowing clouds of black smoke from its four tall, thin turrets, everybody was fairly sure that the Witch had moved out of the Waste again and was about to terrorize the country the way she used to fifty years ago.

People got very scared indeed. Nobody went out alone, particularly at night. What made it all the scarier was that the castle did not stay in the same place. Sometimes it was a tall black smudge on the moors to the northwest, sometimes it reared above the rocks to the east, and sometimes it came right downhill to sit in the heather only just beyond the last farm to the north. You could see it actually moving sometimes, with smoke pouring out from the turrets in dirty gray gusts. For a while everyone was certain that the castle would come right down into the valley before long, and the Mayor talked of sending to the King for help. But the castle stayed roving about the hills, and it was learned that it did not belong to the Witch but to Wizard Howl. Wizard Howl was bad enough. Though he did not seem to want to leave the hills, he was known to amuse himself by collecting young girls and sucking the souls from them. Or some people said he ate their hearts. He was an utterly cold-blooded and heartless wizard and no young girl was safe from him if he caught her on her own. Sophie, Lettie, and Martha, along with all the other girls in Market Chipping, were warned never to go out alone, which was a great annoyance to them. They wondered what use Wizard Howl found for all the souls he collected. They had other things on their minds before long, however, for Mr. Hatter died suddenly just as Sophie was old enough to leave school for good. It then appeared that Mr. Hatter had been altogether too proud of his daughters. The school fees he had been paying had left the shop with quite heavy debts. When the funeral was over, Fanny sat down in the parlor in the house next door to the shop and explained the situation. "You'll all have to leave that school, I'm afraid," she said. "I've been doing sums back and front and sideways, and the only way I can see to keep the business going and take care of the three of you is to see you all settled in a promising apprenticeship somewhere. It isn't practical to have you all in the shop. I can't afford it. So this is what I've decided. Lettie first--" howl's mo. Copyright © by Diana Jones. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved. Available now wherever books are sold. Excerpt from Howl's Moving Castle Film Comics by Diana Wynne Jones. All rights reserved by the original copyright owners. Excerpts are provided for display purposes only and may not be reproduced, reprinted or distributed without the written permission of the publisher.

Recommendations

Castle in the air

Chronicles of Chrestomanci
Jones, Diana Wynne — ©2001, book, Any language

Castle in the air
Jones, Diana Wynne — 2001, book, Any language

Wild magic
Pierce, Tamora — 2005, book, Any language

Good omens: The nice and accurate prophecies of Agnes Nutter, witch

The princess and the hound
Harrison, Mette Ivie — 2008, book, Any language

House of many ways
Jones, Diana Wynne — ©2008, book, Any language
Howl's Moving Castle was released in North America by Walt Disney Pictures, who distributed the film both in its original Japanese and in a dubbed English version; the English-speaking voice cast includes Christian Bale, Emily Mortimer, Jean Simmons, Lauren Bacall, and Billy Crystal. — Mark Deming, Rovi.

Abhorsen

A tale of Time City

House of many ways
Jones, Diana Wynne — 2008, book, Any language

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