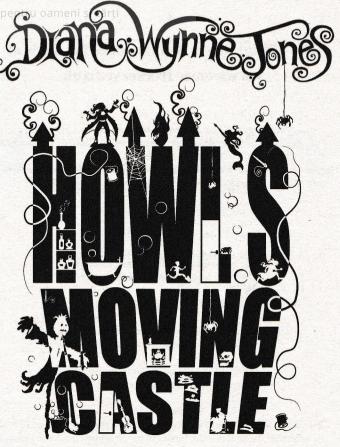
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Illustrated by Tim Stevens



HarperCollins Children's Books



This one is for Stephen

The idea for this book was suggested by a boy in a school I was visiting, who asked me to write a book called *The Moving Castle*.

I wrote down his name, and put it in such a safe place that I have been unable to find it ever since.

I would like to thank him very much.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## In which Sophie talks to hats

n 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 favour 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 realised 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 hair-pulling 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.

RespAbout 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 Suliman 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 terrorise 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 grey 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