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 Hatter reads a great deal and soon realizes that as the eldest of three daughters she is doomed to an uninteresting future. She resigns herself to making a living as a hatter and helping her younger sisters prepare to make their fortunes. But adventure seeks her out in the shop where she sits alone, dreaming over her hats. The wicked Witch of the Waste, angered by "competition" in the area, turns her into a old woman, so she seeks refuge inside the strange moving castle of the wizard Howl. Howl, advertised by his apprentice as an eater of souls, lives a mad, frantic life trying to escape the curse the witch has placed on him, find the perfect girl of his dreams and end the contract he and his fire demon have entered. Sophie, against her best instincts and at first unaware of her own powers, falls in love. So goes this intricate, humorous and puzzling tale of fantasy and adventure which should both challenge and involve readers. Jones has created an engaging set of characters and found a new use for many of the appurtenances of fairy tales - seven league boots and invisible cloaks, among others. At times, the action becomes so complex that readers may have to go back to see what actually happened, and at the end so many loose ends have to be tied up at once that it's dizzying. Yet Jones' inventiveness never fails, and her conclusion is infinitely satisfying. Sara Miller, White Plains Public Library, N.Y. (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

Sophie is caught between a powerful witch and wizard who are terrorizing the magical land of Ingary. Living a humdrum life as a hatter till the malicious Witch of the Waste casts a spell turning her into an old woman, Sophie seeks refuge as cleaning woman to Wizard Howl (although he's rumored to eat the hearts of young girls) in his castle, which moves at will about the countryside. Actually, Howl is a brash young man whose only vice is womanizing. He is a gifted wizard but the despair of his inept apprentice and of Calcifer, a humorously petulant fire demon, because of such human faults as messiness and spending too long in the bath. As in her memorable Archer's Goon, Jones has a plethora of characters who are seldom what they seem and an intricate plot which may dazzle with its complexity or delight by the hilarious common-sense consequences of its preposterous premises. Sophie is a dauntless heroine; when she regains her youth and wins Howl, the odds are this is only the beginning of a tempestuous romance. Great fun. Copyright ©Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

Feisty Sophie falls in love with the Wizard Howl, even as she sees that he's messy, vain, hysterical, and vulnerable, in this elaborate wild fantasy filled with quests and enchantments. (Je 1 86)

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 unwittingly 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
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 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. 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 Chapter One In which Sophie talks to hats 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.

Excerpt

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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
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. (First paragraph of Howl’s Moving Castle). Dedication: “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. By contrast, Howl’s Moving Castle focuses on Sophie Hatter, a woman who isn’t all that sure of herself, who often feels anxious in large groups, and who spends much of the novel learning what most of us see right away: that she is an amazing character with a ton of courage and talent. Oh don’t get us wrong: Howl’s Moving Castle still has all of the magical explosions, grand romance, and fights to the death that make fantasy as a genre so much fun to read.