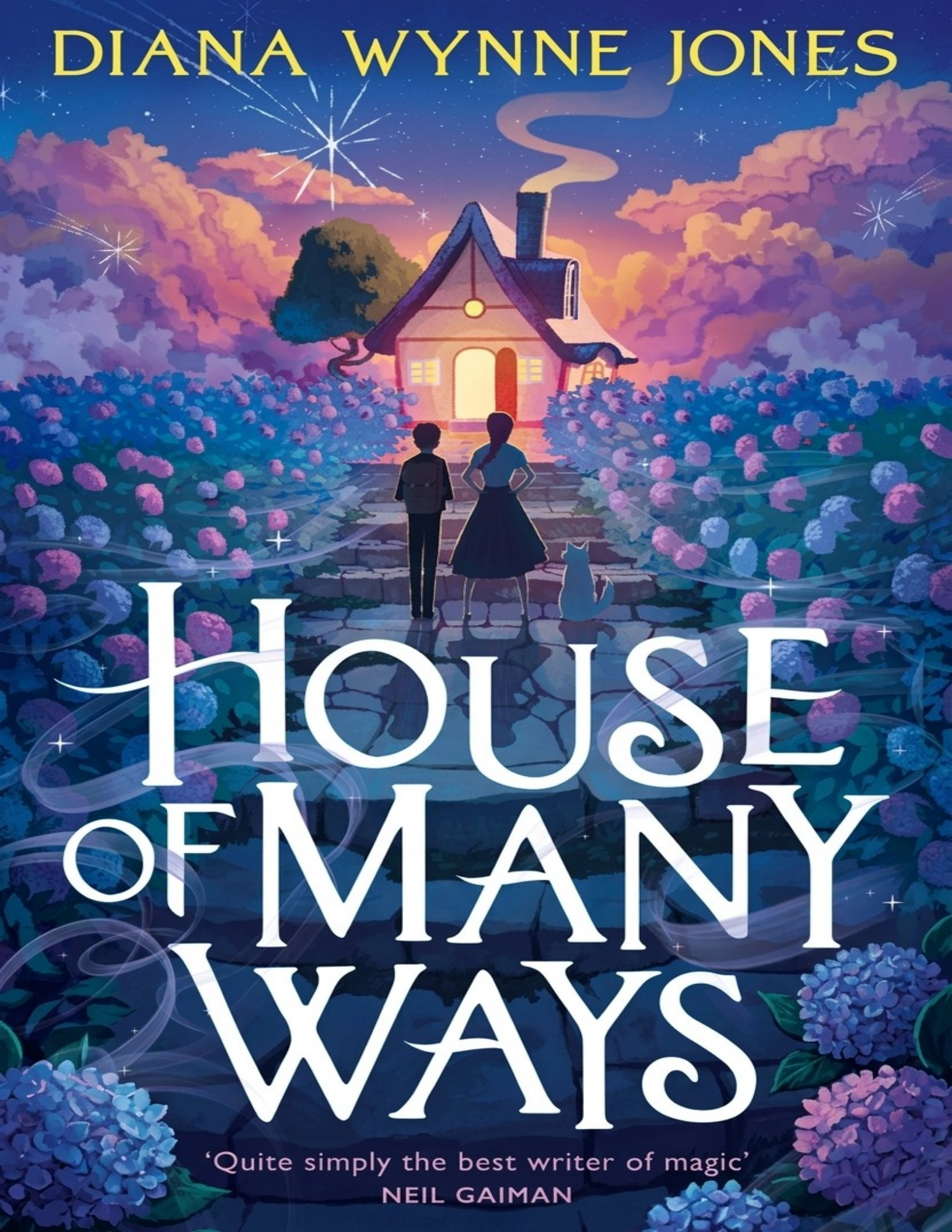


DIANA WYNNE JONES



HOUSE OF MANY WAYS

‘Quite simply the best writer of magic’
NEIL GAIMAN

HOUSE
OF MANY
WAYS

DIANA WYNNE JONES

HOUSE OF MANY WAYS

Illustrated by Tim Stevens



HarperCollins *Children's Books*

First published in the United Kingdom by HarperCollins *Children's Books*
in 2008

Published in this ebook edition in 2023

HarperCollins *Children's Books* is a division of HarperCollins *Publishers*
Ltd,
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF

www.harpercollins.co.uk

HarperCollins *Publishers*
Macken House, 39/40 Mayor Street Upper
Dublin 1, D01 C9W8, Ireland

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Source ISBN: 9780007275687

Ebook Edition © June 2023 ISBN: 9780007281978

Version: 2023-06-26



*To my granddaughter, Ruth, together with Sharyn's laundry
and also to Lilly B.*



Dear Reader,

Here is my new book, *House of Many Ways*, which I hope you will enjoy. It is a sequel to *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Castle in the Air*, set in the world where such things as seven-league boots and flying carpets are not only possible but real. For this one we move to the mountainous kingdom of High Norland, where the elderly King and his almost equally elderly daughter are busy cataloguing their huge library, but not too busy to notice that they are getting poorer and poorer. Their Royal Wizard falls ill and is unable to help them, which is how we come to meet Charmain, a cross-grained teenager who has been brought up so respectably that she knows almost nothing about anything except books. Charmain is volunteered to look after the Royal Wizard's house while he is ill. But of course a wizard's house is bound to be peculiar, and this one is, very.

While Charmain struggles with its peculiarities and with a very small and very greedy dog called Waif, she runs into the fearsome lubbock, a cocksure boy called Peter, a tribe of kobolds, and the inhabitants of the moving castle – Sophie, her son Morgan, Calcifer the fire demon and Wizard Howl in a very irritating disguise. Oh, and there are elves too, not to speak of Jamal the cook and his surly dog.

I had fun writing this. I hope you will have equal fun reading it.

Diana Wynne Jones

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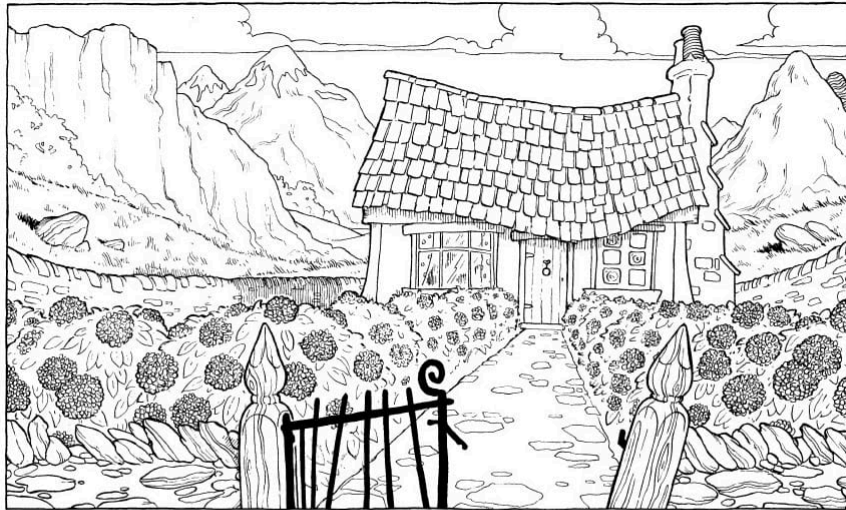
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KEEP READING ...

OTHER TITLES BY DIANA WYNNE JONES

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER



CHAPTER ONE

In which Charmain is volunteered
to look after a wizard's house

“Charmain must do it,” said Aunt Sempronia. “We can’t leave Great Uncle William to face this on his own.”

“Your Great Uncle William?” said Mrs Baker. “Isn’t he—” She coughed and lowered her voice because this, to her mind, was not quite nice. “Isn’t he a *wizard*?”

“Of course,” said Aunt Sempronia. “But he has—” Here she too lowered her voice. “He has a *growth*, you know, on his insides, and only the elves can help him. They have to carry him off in order to cure him, you see, and *someone* has to look after his house. Spells, you know, *escape* if there’s no

one there to watch them. And *I* am far too busy to do it. My stray dogs' charity alone—"

"Me too. We're up to our ears in wedding cake orders this month," Mrs Baker said hastily. "Sam was saying only this morning—"

"Then it has to be Charmain," Aunt Sempronia decreed. "Surely she's old enough now."

"Er—" said Mrs Baker.

They both looked across the parlour to where Mrs Baker's daughter sat, deep in a book, as usual, with her long, thin body bent into what sunlight came in past Mrs Baker's geraniums, her red hair pinned up in a sort of birds' nest and her glasses perched on the end of her nose. She held one of her father's huge juicy pasties in one hand and munched it as she read. Crumbs kept falling on her book and she brushed them off with the pasty when they fell on the page she was reading.

"Er... did you hear us, dear?" Mrs Baker said anxiously.

"No," Charmain said with her mouth full. "What?"

"That's settled, then," Aunt Sempronia said. "I'll leave it to you to explain to her, Berenice, dear." She stood up, majestically shaking out the folds of her stiff silk dress and then of her silk parasol. "I'll be back to fetch her tomorrow morning," she said. "Now I'd better go and tell poor Great Uncle William that Charmain will be taking care of things for him."

She swept out of the parlour, leaving Mrs Baker to wish that her husband's aunt was not so rich or so bossy, and to wonder how she was going to explain to Charmain, let alone to Sam. Sam never allowed Charmain to do anything that was not utterly respectable. Nor did Mrs Baker either, except when Aunt Sempronia took a hand.

Aunt Sempronia, meanwhile, mounted into her smart little pony trap and had her groom drive her out of the other side of town where Great Uncle William lived.

"I've fixed it all up," she announced, sailing through the magic ways to where Great Uncle William sat glumly writing in his study. "My great niece Charmain is coming here tomorrow. She will see you on your way and look

after you when you come back. In between, she will take care of the house for you.”

“How very kind of her,” said Great Uncle William. “I take it she is well versed in magic, then?”

“I have no idea,” said Aunt Sempronia. “What I *do* know is that she never has her nose out of a book, never does a hand’s turn in the house and is treated like a sacred object by both her parents. It will do her *good* to do something normal for a change.”

“Oh dear,” said Great Uncle William. “Thank you for warning me. I shall take precautions then.”

“Do that,” said Aunt Sempronia. “And you had better make sure there is plenty of food in the place. I’ve never *known* a girl who eats so much. And remains thin as a witch’s besom with it. I’ve *never* understood it. I’ll bring her here tomorrow before the elves come, then.”

She turned and left. “Thank you,” Great Uncle William said weakly to her stiff, rustling back. “Dear, dear,” he added, as the front door slammed. “Ah, well. One has to be grateful to one’s relatives, I suppose.”

Charmain, oddly enough, was quite grateful to Aunt Sempronia too. Not that she was in the least grateful for being volunteered to look after an old, sick wizard whom she had never met. “She might have asked *me!*” she said, rather often, to her mother.

“I think she knew you would say no, dear,” Mrs Baker suggested eventually.

“I might have,” Charmain said. “Or,” she added, with a secretive smile, “I might not have.”

“Dear, I’m not expecting you to *enjoy* it,” Mrs Baker said tremulously. “It’s not at all *nice*. It’s just that it would be so very kind—”

“You know I’m not kind,” Charmain said, and she went away upstairs to her white frilly bedroom, where she sat at her nice desk, staring out of her window at the roofs, towers and chimneys of High Norland City, and then up at the blue mountains beyond. The truth was, this was the chance

she had been longing for. She was tired of her respectable school and *very* tired of living at home, with her mother treating her as if Charmain were a tigress no one was sure was tame, and her father forbidding her to do things because they were not nice, or not safe, or not usual. This was a chance to leave home and do something – the *one* thing – Charmain had always wanted to do. It was worth putting up with a wizard's house just for that. She wondered if she had the courage to write the letter that went with it.

For a long time she had no courage at all. She sat and stared at the clouds piling along the peaks of the mountains, white and purple, making shapes like fat animals and thin swooping dragons. She stared until the clouds had wisped away into nothing but faint mist against a blue sky. Then she said, "Now or nothing." After that she sighed, fetched her glasses up on the chain that hung round her neck, and got out her good pen and her best writing paper. She wrote, in her best writing:

Your Majesty,

Ever since I was a small child and first heard of your great collection of books and manuscripts, I have longed to work in your

library. Although I know that you yourself, with the aid of your daughter, Her Royal Highness Princess Hilda, are personally engaged in the long and difficult task of sorting and listing the contents of the Royal Library, I nevertheless hope that you might appreciate my help. Since I am of age, I wish to apply for the post of librarian assistant in the Royal Library. I hope Your Majesty will not find my application too presumptuous.

Yours truly, Charmain Baker 12 Corn Street High Norland City

Charmain sat back and reread her letter. There was no way, she thought, that writing like this to the old King could be anything other than

sheer cheek, but it seemed to her that the letter was quite a good one. The one thing in it that was dubious was the “I am of age.” She knew that was supposed to mean that a person was twenty-one – or at least eighteen – but she felt it was not *exactly* a lie. She had not said what age she was *of*, after all. And she hadn’t, either, said that she was hugely learned or highly qualified, because she knew she was not. She hadn’t even said that she loved books more than anything else in the world, although this was perfectly true. She would just have to trust her love of books shone through.

I’m quite sure the King will just scrumple the letter up and throw it on the fire, she thought. But at least I tried.

She went out and posted the letter, feeling very brave and defiant.

The next morning, Aunt Sempronia arrived in her pony trap and loaded Charmain into it, along with a neat carpet bag that Mrs Baker had packed full of Charmain’s clothes, and a much larger bag that Mr Baker had packed, bulging with pasties and tasties, buns, flans and tarts. So large was this second bag, and smelling so strongly of savoury herbs, gravy, cheese, fruit, jam and spices, that the groom driving the trap turned round and sniffed in astonishment, and even Aunt Sempronia’s stately nostrils flared.

“Well, you’ll not starve, child,” she said. “Drive on.”

But the groom had to wait until Mrs Baker had embraced Charmain and said, “I know I can trust you, dear, to be good and tidy and considerate.”

That’s a lie, Charmain thought. She doesn’t trust me an inch.

Then Charmain’s father hurried up to peck a kiss on Charmain’s cheek. “We know you’ll not let us down, Charmain,” he said.

That’s another lie, Charmain thought. You know I will.

“And we’ll miss you, my love,” her mother said, nearly in tears.

That may not be a lie! Charmain thought, in some surprise. Though it beats me why they even like me.

“Drive on!” Aunt Sempronia said sternly, and the groom did. When the pony was sedately ambling through the streets, she said, “Now, Charmain, I know your parents have given you the best of everything and you’ve never had to do a thing for yourself in your life. Are you prepared to look after yourself for a change?”

“Oh, yes,” Charmain said devoutly.

“And the house and the poor old man?” Aunt Sempronia persisted.

“I’ll do my best,” Charmain said. She was afraid Aunt Sempronia would turn round and drive her straight back home if she didn’t say this.

“You’ve had a good education, haven’t you?” Aunt Sempronia said.

“Even music,” Charmain admitted, rather sulkily. She added hastily, “But I wasn’t any good at it. So don’t expect me to play soothing tunes to Great Uncle William.”

“I don’t,” Aunt Sempronia retorted. “As he’s a wizard, he can probably make his own soothing tunes. I was simply trying to find out whether you’ve had a proper grounding in magic. You have, haven’t you?”

Charmain’s insides seemed to drop away downwards somewhere and she felt as if they were taking the blood from her face with them. She did not dare confess that she knew not the first thing about magic. Her parents – particularly Mrs Baker – did not think magic was nice. And theirs was such a respectable part of town that Charmain’s school never taught anyone magic. If anyone wanted to learn anything so vulgar, they had to go to a private tutor instead. And Charmain knew her parents would never have paid for any such lessons. “Er...” she began.

Luckily, Aunt Sempronia simply continued. “Living in a house full of magic is no joke, you know.”

“Oh, I won’t ever think of it as a joke,” Charmain said earnestly.

“Good,” said Aunt Sempronia, and sat back.

The pony clopped on and on. They clopped through Royal Square, past the Royal Mansion looming at one end of it with its golden roof flashing in the sun, and on through Market Square, where Charmain was seldom allowed to go. She looked wistfully at the stalls and at all the people buying

things and chattering, and stared backwards at the place as they came into the older part of town. Here the houses were so tall and colourful and so different from one another – each one seemed to have steeper gables and more oddly placed windows than the one before it – that Charmain began to have hopes that living in Great Uncle William's house might prove to be very interesting after all. But the pony clopped onward, through the dingier, poorer parts, and then past mere cottages, and then out among fields and hedges, where a great cliff leaned over the road and only the occasional small house stood backed into the hedgerows, and the mountains towered closer and closer above.

Charmain began to think they were going out of High Norland and into another country altogether. What would it be? Strangia? Montalbino? She wished she had paid more attention to geography lessons.

Just as she was wishing this, the groom drew up at a small mouse-coloured house crouching at the back of a long front garden. Charmain looked at it across its small iron gate and felt utterly disappointed. It was the most boring house she had ever seen. It had a window on either side of its brown front door and the mouse-coloured roof came down above them like a scowl. There did not seem to be an upstairs at all.

"Here we are," Aunt Sempronia said cheerfully. She got down, clattered open the little iron gate, and led the way up the path to the front door. Charmain prowled gloomily after her while the groom followed them with Charmain's two bags. The garden on either side of the path appeared to consist entirely of hydrangea bushes, blue, green-blue and mauve.

"I don't suppose you'll have to look after the garden," Aunt Sempronia said airily. I should hope not! Charmain thought. "I'm fairly sure William employs a gardener," Aunt Sempronia said.

"I hope he does," Charmain said. The most she knew about gardens was the Bakers' own back yard, which contained one large mulberry tree and a rosebush, plus the window boxes where her mother grew runner beans. She knew there was earth under the plants and that the earth contained worms. She shuddered.

Aunt Sempronia clattered briskly at the knocker on the brown front door and then pushed her way into the house, calling out, “Coo-ee! I’ve brought Charmain for you!”

“Thank you kindly,” said Great Uncle William.

The front door led straight into a musty living room, where Great Uncle William was sitting in a musty, mouse-coloured armchair. There was a large leather suitcase beside him, as if he were all ready to depart. “Pleased to meet you, my dear,” he said to Charmain.

“How do you do, sir,” Charmain replied politely.

Before either of them could say anything else, Aunt Sempronia said, “Well, then, I’ll love you and leave you. Put her bags down there,” she said to her groom. The groom obediently dumped the bags down just inside the front door and went away again. Aunt Sempronia followed him in a sizzle of expensive silks, calling, “Goodbye, both of you!” as she went.

The front door banged shut, leaving Charmain and Great Uncle William staring at each other. Great Uncle William was a small man and mostly bald except for some locks of fine, silvery hair streaked across his rather domed head. He sat in a stiff, bent, crumpled way that showed Charmain he was in quite a lot of pain. She was surprised to find that she felt sorry for him, but she did wish he wouldn’t stare at her so steadily. It made her feel guilty. And his lower eyelids drooped from his tired blue eyes, showing the insides all red, like blood. Charmain disliked blood almost as much as she disliked earthworms.

“Well, you seem a very tall, competent-looking young lady,” Great Uncle William said. His voice was tired and gentle. “The red hair is a good sign, to my mind. Very good. Do you think you can manage here while I’m gone? The place is a little disordered, I’m afraid.”

“I expect so,” Charmain said. The musty room seemed quite tidy to her. “Can you tell me some of the things I ought to do?” Though I hope I shan’t be here long, she thought. Once the King replies to my letter...

“As to that,” said Great Uncle William, “the usual household things, of course, but magical. Naturally, most of it’s magical. As I wasn’t sure what

grade of magic you'll have reached, I took some steps—”

Horrors! Charmain thought. He thinks I know magic!

She tried to interrupt Great Uncle William to explain, but at that moment they were both interrupted. The front door clattered open and a procession of tall, tall elves walked quietly in. They were all most medically dressed in white, and there was no expression on their beautiful faces at all. Charmain stared at them, utterly unnerved by their beauty, their height, their neutrality and, above all, by their complete silence. One of them moved her gently aside and she stood where she was put, feeling clumsy and disorderly, while the rest clustered around Great Uncle William with their dazzling fair heads bent over him. Charmain was not sure what they did, but in next to no time Great Uncle William was dressed in a white robe and they were lifting him out of his chair. There were what seemed to be three red apples stuck to his head. Charmain could see he was asleep.

“Er... haven't you forgotten his suitcase?” she said, as they carried him away towards the door.

“No need for it,” one of the elves said, holding the door open for the others to ease Great Uncle William out through it.

After that, they were all going away down the garden path. Charmain dashed to the open front door and called after them, “How long is he going to be away?” It suddenly seemed urgent to know how long she was going to be left in charge here.

“As long as it takes,” another of the elves replied. Then they were all gone before they reached the garden gate.



CHAPTER TWO

In which Charmain
explores the house

Charmain stared at the empty path for a while and then shut the front door with a bang. “*Now* what do I do?” she said to the deserted, musty room.

“You will have to tidy the kitchen, I’m afraid, my dear,” said Great Uncle William’s tired, kindly voice out of thin air. “I apologise for leaving so much laundry. Please open my suitcase for more complicated instructions.”

Charmain shot the suitcase a look. So Great Uncle William had meant to leave it, then. “In a minute,” she said to it. “I haven’t unpacked for

myself yet.” She picked up her two bags and marched with them to the only other door. It was at the back of the room and, when Charmain had tried to open it with the hand that held the food bag, then with that hand and with both bags in the other hand, and finally with both hands and with both bags on the floor, she found it led to the kitchen.

She stared for a moment. Then she dragged her two bags round the door just as it was shutting and stared some more.

“What a *mess!*” she said.

It ought to have been a comfortable, spacious kitchen. It had a big window looking out on to the mountains, where sunlight came warmly pouring through. Unfortunately, the sunlight only served to highlight the enormous stacks of plates and cups piled into the sink and on the draining board and down on the floor beside the sink. The sunlight then went on – and Charmain’s dismayed eyes went with it – to cast a golden glow over the two big canvas laundry bags leaning beside the sink. They were stuffed so full with dirty washing that Great Uncle William had been using them as a shelf for a pile of dirty saucepans and a frying pan or so.

Charmain’s eyes travelled from there to the table in the middle of the room. Here was where Great Uncle William appeared to keep his supply of thirty or so teapots and the same number of milk jugs – not to speak of several that had once held gravy. It was all quite neat in its way, Charmain thought, just crowded and not clean.

“I suppose you *have* been ill,” Charmain said grudgingly to the thin air.

There was no reply this time. Cautiously, she went over to the sink, where, she had a feeling, something was missing. It took her a moment or so to realise that there were no taps. Probably this house was so far outside town that no water pipes had been laid. When she looked through the window, she could see a small yard outside and a pump in the middle of it.

“So I’m supposed to go and pump water and then bring it in, and *then* what?” Charmain demanded. She looked over at the dark, empty fireplace. It was summer, after all, so naturally there was no fire, nor anything to burn that she could see. “I heat the water?” she said. “In a dirty saucepan,