

Diana Wynne Jones

THE SEQUEL TO HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE

HOUSE OF  
MANY WAYS



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# **House of Many Ways**

The Sequel to Howl's Moving Castle

 HarperCollins e-books

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

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## 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 parlor 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 parlor, 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 beyond 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 savory 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 downward 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 backward at the place as they came into the older part of town. Here the houses were so tall and colorful 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