TRANSLATION WORK

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In the land of Ingaria, where things like seven-mile boots and invisible hats really do exist, it's bad luck to be born the eldest of three children. Everyone realizes that if all three of them go off in search of happiness, you will be the first to fail - and fail badly. Sophie Hutter was the eldest of three sisters. And it would be nice if she was born in the family of a poor woodcutter - that would promise at least some hope for success. On the contrary, Sophie's parents were well-to-do people who ran a ladies' hat shop in a thriving town called Market Chipping. Sophie's own mother died when the little girl was two, and her sister Letty - just a year old, and then her father married a younger saleswoman, a pretty blonde named Fanny. Very soon Fanny gave birth to a third sister, Martha. This was supposed to turn Sophie and Letty into the Evil Big Sisters - ugly, of course - but in fact all three girls grew up very pretty, though no one doubted that Letty was the prettiest. Fanny was equally affectionate to all three girls, and never singled out Martha in any way.

Mr. Hutter was proud of his daughters and sent them to the best school in town. Sophie turned out to be the most diligent. She read very much and soon enough found out how little chance she had of an interesting future. This was a great disappointment to Sophie, but she was quite content with this life, looking after her sisters and preparing Martha for a happy destiny, for she knew it was coming. Since Fanny was always busy in the shop, Sophie had to look after the younger ones. The younger ones often yelled at each other and even pulled each other's hair. Lettie was not going to accept her failure, for it was clear that she was going to fail miserably after Sophie.

- It's not fair! - she shouted. - So what if Martha is the youngest? Does that make her better than us? When I marry the prince, then you'll know!

Martha snorted irritably, saying that she was sure to get rich without marrying anyone. So Sophie had to pull them apart and mend their dresses. She was very good with a needle. Soon she was dressing her sisters herself. Last May Day, shortly before our story began, Sophy made Letty a dark pink dress, which Fanny said looked like something from the most expensive store in Kingsbury.

About that time there was talk of the Witch of the Swamp again. It was said that the Witch had threatened to kill the King's daughter, and that the King had ordered his court wizard, the Wizard Saliman, to go to the Swamps and deal with the Witch. Apparently, the Wizard Saliman did not deal with the Witch, but died by her hand.

So when, a few months later, a tall black castle suddenly appeared in the hills near Market Chipping, spewing clouds of black smoke from four tall, thin towers, everyone was sure that the Witch had left the Swamp again and would terrorize the whole area, as she had done fifty years before. In Market Chipping they were frightened. No one left the house alone, especially at night. The scariest thing was that the castle never stood still. Sometimes it loomed black on the peat bogs to the north-west, sometimes it loomed over the cliffs to the east, and sometimes it came down from the hills and sat among the heather just beyond the last farm to the north. Sometimes you could even see it moving, and dirty black puffs of smoke wafted from the towers this way and that. For a while everyone thought that the castle would soon descend straight into the Vale, and the mayor began to talk about sending to the king for help.