

# The Castle in the Attic



YEARLING

ELIZABETH  
WINTHROP





## CHAPTER 1



On Monday afternoon, Mrs. Phillips was waiting for William at the kitchen door. He came in shaking like a dog and blowing the raindrops off the tip of his nose.

"I still can't do it," he said.

She looked disappointed. "What do you mean?"

"He's added an Arabian dive roll at the end of my floor routine. Before I even get through the hand-springs, my legs feel like jelly."

"I'll just have to help you practice some more." She turned back to the sink. "Lots of work to do. We don't have that much more time."

"The meet is still six weeks away," he said as he hung his dripping poncho on the hook by the door.

"Sit down, William," she said. "There's something I have to tell you."

Her voice was formal, distant. He sat on the stool and wiped off his face with the towel she handed him.

"I'm going to be leaving the end of this month."

"For vacation?"

"No," she said. "For good. I'm moving back to England to live with my brother."

"Why?" he asked.

"It might seem silly to you, but I'm homesick. Even after all these years. And you're getting old enough to take care of yourself."

Mrs. Phillips had been with William's family since he was born. Ten years. "I thought you were going to stay until I grew up," he said, still turning the idea around in his mind. He couldn't seem to absorb it.

She sat down at the table across from him. "Look at me."

He shook his head. If he looked at her, he might start crying.

"William, you're ten years old. You can take care of yourself now."

"How do you know?" he shouted. He shoved his chair away from the table. "You're not going to leave me. I won't let you." He ran out of the room before she could say anything else.

Mrs. Phillips owned two things that she really cared about. One was the picture of her husband, who'd



been killed in World War II, and the other was her mother's pearl circle pin. When she went home to her little apartment in town on weekends, she left these two objects at William's house, where she thought they'd be safer.

"When I die, William," she often said, "be sure they bury me with my picture and my pin."

On Saturday morning, William took them and hid them in the shoebox that held his rock collection. He knew Mrs. Phillips would never leave without them.

She must have noticed they were gone right away because the first thing she always did on Monday morning was open her top bureau drawer and take them out. When she picked him up from gymnastics practice in the afternoon, she looked at him for a long time without saying anything. He got all ready to lie, but she didn't bring up the subject. On Tuesday, his father and Mrs. Phillips stopped talking the moment he walked into the kitchen.

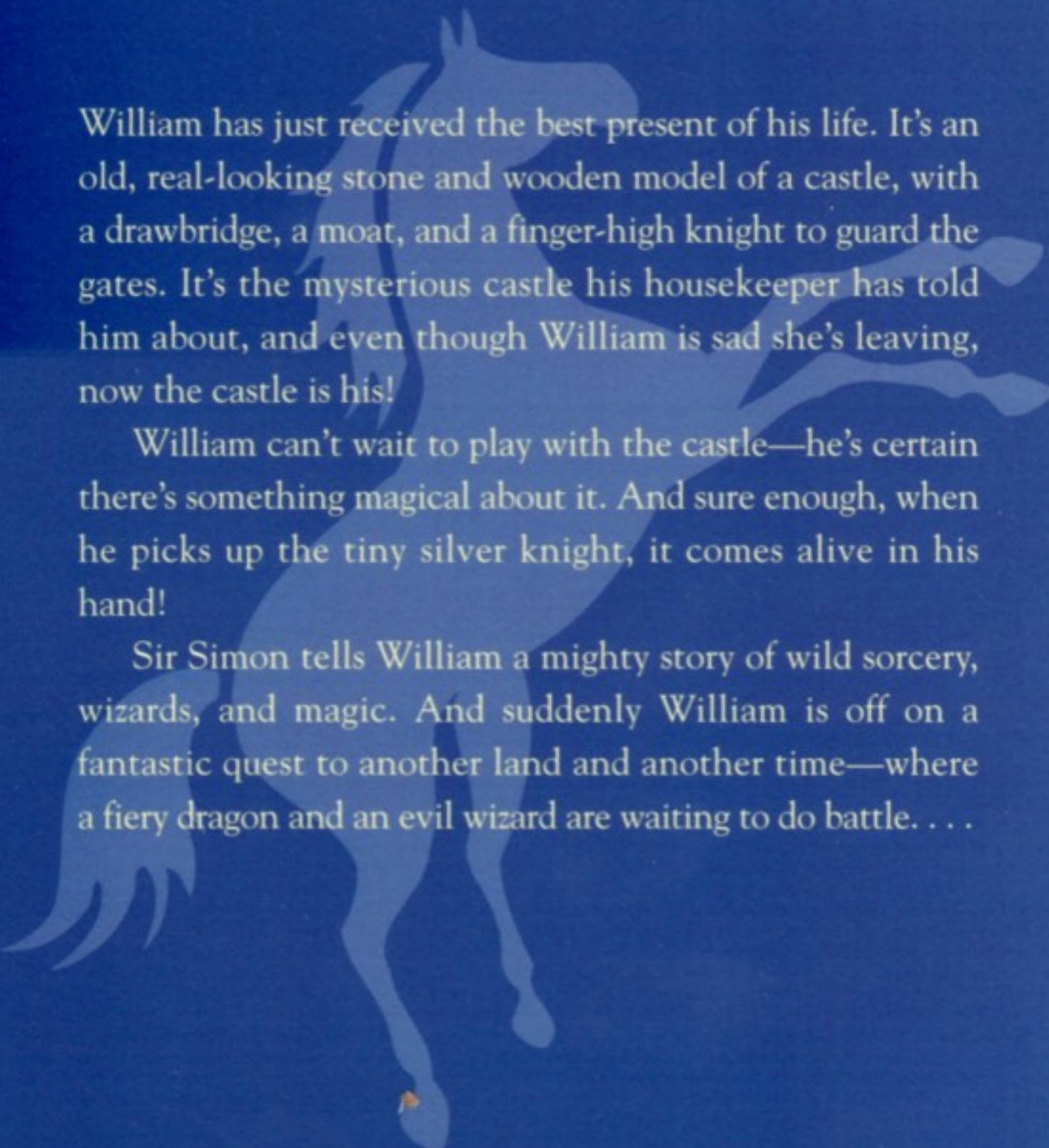
"Hello," William said brightly.

Mrs. Phillips turned away without a word.

"Hello, William. Finished your homework?" his father asked as he drifted out of the room.

His mother was the first one to come out and ask him directly. She was tucking him into bed Wednesday night when she brought it up. "Have you seen Mrs. Phillips's picture? You know, the one of her





William has just received the best present of his life. It's an old, real-looking stone and wooden model of a castle, with a drawbridge, a moat, and a finger-high knight to guard the gates. It's the mysterious castle his housekeeper has told him about, and even though William is sad she's leaving, now the castle is his!

William can't wait to play with the castle—he's certain there's something magical about it. And sure enough, when he picks up the tiny silver knight, it comes alive in his hand!

Sir Simon tells William a mighty story of wild sorcery, wizards, and magic. And suddenly William is off on a fantastic quest to another land and another time—where a fiery dragon and an evil wizard are waiting to do battle. . . .

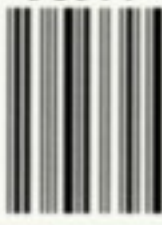
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