

The Problems with Castles and Evil Sisters

Thanks to movie magic and an absurd number of fairy tales with knights, dragons, kings, and queens, lots of children dream of growing up in old, brick castles surrounded by moats and rolling green fields. What they don't tell you in the movies is that living in a castle comes with lots of problems.

Trust me, I would know.

When my parents first told me that great-great-aunt-What's-Her-Name accidentally fell into a moat and drowned, I knew it was only a matter of time before we packed up our little suburban house and moved into the castle. But, like I said, castles come with problems.

Problem 1: they're entirely too cold. The minute you step away from one of the roaring fires, you're shivering. Fair warning—should you ever find yourself moving into a castle, make sure to pack lots of extra layers and socks that don't have holes in them (I learned that the hard way).

Problem 2: Think you're going to have plumbing and electricity? Think again. When Mom and Dad first told me about this, I was *not* happy.

"James," they said, after sitting me down in our living room. "Your great-great-aunt-What's-Her-Name died, and she left us her castle. There's no plumbing and no electricity, so it'll be a great adventure!"

That's what they said. What I heard was, "James, you can kiss your computer goodbye."

And that's what I did. Near tears, I ran right out of the living room and upstairs to my room, where I threw myself into my desk chair, leaned forward right over the keyboard, and gave my computer monitor a big smooch right on the screen.

I don't know how my parents expect me to survive.

Problem 3a: Once you get used to the cold and you forget that Wi-Fi exists in some parts of the world, castle living isn't so bad. That is...until you remember that you have an older sister that likes to torment you 24/7 now that she can no longer text her friends or Facetime her boyfriend (this isn't all bad, since she recently discovered the lost art of writing love letters).

Problem 3b: One day you discover that the castle has a fully stocked armory. This is cool until your sister discovers it too.

"You READ my LOVE LETTERS??" my sister screams, raising an ax and hurling it across the room at my head. I duck just in time for the ax to plant itself in the center of a wooden shield hanging on the wall behind me.

"What? It's not like there's anything else to do here!" I side-step to avoid taking a mace to the gut.

Sylvia (that's my sister) wasn't this unpleasant until we moved to the castle. Normally, she would contain her moderate unpleasantness to her bedroom before and after school, and I would only cross paths with her every now and then when she wandered to the kitchen to scrounge for food. But now, away from civilization, she's a monster, always lurking through the castle and keeping to the shadows.

But who could really blame her? She hadn't seen her boyfriend in four days, eight hours, and thirty-two minutes (according to her calculations this morning when she complained to our parents *yet again* about the move during breakfast. And I thought *I* was the family mathematician).

“JAMES OLIVER JOHNSON, YOU GET BACK HERE!”

I race out of the armory and down the hallway, past two and a half suits of armor (Sylvia took her anger out on one yesterday afternoon). I'm nearly to the spiral staircase that leads to the dungeons that haven't been used since my great-great-great-great-grandfather got into his last disagreement with my great-great-great-great-grandmother, when Sylvia steps out in front of me.

I screech to a halt so fast that I land on my butt on the stone floor and my glasses slide down my nose. I push them back up to the bridge of my nose and look up at Sylvia, who is leering down at me with an evil grin on her face. Note to self: absence from boyfriends makes older sisters turn just a little crazy.

“James Oliver, I challenge you to a duel,” she says. She drops a rust-covered sword at my side, its clatter echoing down the hallway. She bends down, getting so close to my face that I can smell this morning's breakfast on her breath. “Tonight. Midnight. In the garden maze.”

I turn around, watching as she walks past me. I want to make sure she actually leaves, but she stops and faces me once more.

“Oh, and one more thing,” she says, letting that awful grin creep back over her face. “Don't tell Mom and Dad.”

Yep, I'm officially done for.