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Opening extract from

Lost Happy Endings

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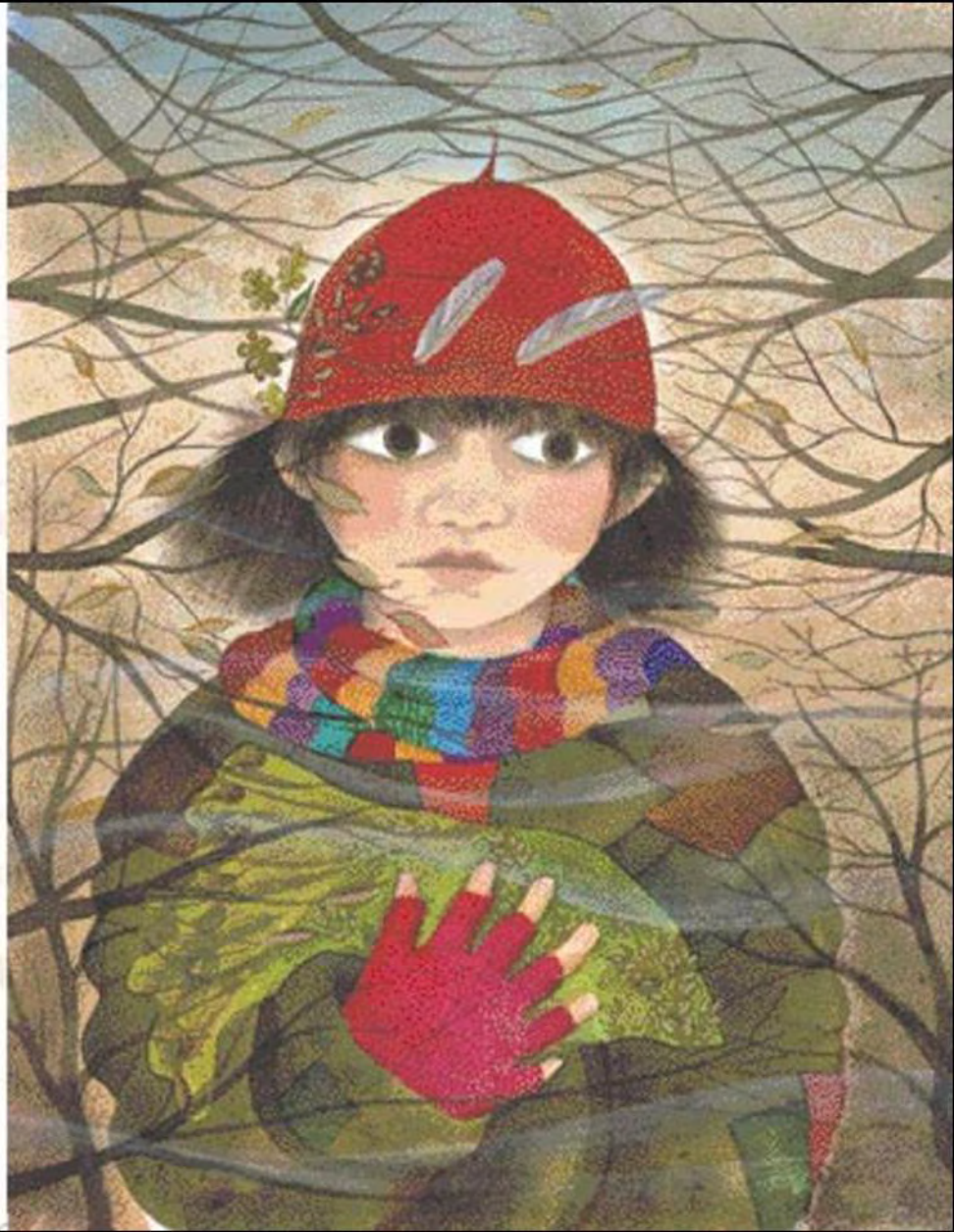
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One evening, as Jub set off with her full sack, she noticed scarves of mist draped in the trees. One of them noosed itself round Jub's neck, soft and damp, and made her shiver.

By the time she had reached the middle of the forest the mist had thickened and Jub could only see a little way ahead. The shadowy trees looked villainous: tall ghouls with long arms and twiggy fingers. Bushes crouched in the fog as though they were ready to pounce like muggers. Jub hurried on.

"Hello, my small dearie."





Jub jumped. A twisted old woman with a face like the bark of a tree and horrible claw hands was standing on the path in front of Jub. She had fierce red eyes like poisonous berries.

"What's in the sack?"

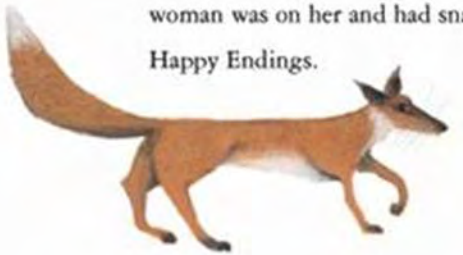
"Let me pass, please," said Jub.

"What's in the sack, I said!"

The old woman had grabbed hold of Jub's arm. Her touch nipped like pepper.

"Let me alone!" gasped Jub. "I must go on."

"Shut up!" said the vicious old woman, and she spat green spittle in Jub's face. Jub was so shocked that she took a step backwards and tripped over a tree-root. Faster than fury, the old woman was on her and had snatched the sack of Happy Endings.





The witch danced crazily around the fire, singing hideously. The flames danced with her, cheek to cheek, step by step, arm in arm, 1-2-3, 1-2-3. The witch's screams scattered the sleeping birds from the trees in a panic of wings. Jub heard the awful noise and smelled a strange, salty, burning smell drifting through the trees. She followed her nose and it led her to the middle of the forest.

At first she thought she had stumbled upon a fire, spitting and crackling like the breath of a dragon. But then the fire opened its jaws and roared and she saw it was the witch burning to death.

