***The Witches***

***Chapter 13***

***Hello Grandmamma***

***Summary:***

* Our narrator and Bruno, both still in mouse form run through the hotel and up the stairs toward Grandmamma's room.
* They get there easily enough, but right outside Grandmamma's door, our narrator sees the maid who had ratted him out before for playing with his mice (no pun intended). He and Bruno hide in a pair of shoes outside the door.
* Unfortunately, the maid decides to put her hand in the shoes, and when our narrator bites her (oops, he couldn't help himself!), she screams bloody murder.
* Luckily, this causes Grandmamma to open the door, and our narrator and Bruno shuffle into her room.
* The narrator shouts to his Grandmamma to close the door, and she does, despite the fact that she's frozen with fear. She knows exactly what has happened.
* She cries and cries, while our narrator-mouse tries to comfort her. It's okay, he says – he's kind of excited to be a mouse. As long as she'll still take care of him, he's not too worried about it. Man, he really has a good attitude about all this.
* While Bruno munches on some food in the room, our narrator tells his grandma the whole story. If you skipped Chapters 5 through 12, this is basically a quick summary.
* He then asks his grandma how it is that he can still talk. She assures him that the witches have only changed his *appearance*, not who he is at his core. He's still her grandson, as he always was, he just looks a little different. He's a "mouse-person" (14.53).
* Then, our mouse-person has an idea. They can't let the witches get away with their plan, and he wants to stop them.
* He remembers that the GHW said her room was number 454, and he's pretty sure he is staying in room 554. If her room is directly below his, he could climb down the balcony and into her room. Since he knows she's at a tea now, he wouldn't get caught. Then he could steal a bottle of the Mouse-Maker and they could – wait for it – turn all the witches into mice. Who's the Brilliant One, now?
* Our narrator and his grandma are both extremely excited about the plan, and after checking to make sure that the narrator's room really is right above the GHW's, they decide they will lower our beloved mouse-person onto the balcony below in a half-finished sock that Grandmamma was knitting. Thank goodness for grandma hobbies.

***Brief Synopsis:***

The boy and Bruno run down the hall and up the stairs to the fifth floor without seeing anyone. Just as they get outside of the boy's grandmother's room, the boy sees the chambermaid coming down the hall. He sees that his grandmother has left a pair of shoes outside the door, and the two boys-as-mice crawl inside them to hide. They hope that the chambermaid will just walk by, but she picks up the shoes. When she puts her hand inside, the boy bites her hand, and she screams incredibly loudly and runs off down the hall. The boy's grandmother opens the door and the two mice dart in the door.

He tells his grandmother to close the door and she is frozen with shock at hearing his voice. She trembles and the boy fears that she will faint, but he persuades her to close the door and calm down. She puts the boy and Bruno on the table and Bruno immediately climbs into a bowl of bananas and starts to eat. He tells her all about the witches' meeting and that he's not upset to be a mouse. When the boy tells her about the witches' plot to kill all of the children in England, he implores her, "we've got to stop them" (123) and his grandmother is terrified by this proposition. He asks her about how he and Bruno can still talk the same way they could before and she suggests that they are more like mouse-people than 100% mice.

Suddenly, the boy has an idea. The Grand High Witch's room is 454, which he thinks must be directly beneath his room, which is room 554. Since all of the rooms have a small balcony attached, he and his grandmother discuss whether he could get down to her balcony and through the open door into her room. Then, he would be able to steal a bottle of Delayed Action Mouse-Maker and give all the witches at the hotel a dose. They go down to the 4th floor and then back up to the 5th floor to check that his room is indeed above hers. Now they must devise a way to get the boy down to the balcony below. The grandmother has the idea to put him in a sock she had been knitting and lower him down by holding on to the ball of yard.

***Critical Study (Bruno Jenkins Disappears – Hello Grandmamma):***

Bruno Jenkins Disappears – The Grand High Witch then reveals to the assembled witches that her formula works by inviting a little boy named Bruno Jenkins to the room. The previous day, the Grand High Witch reveals, she had given him a laced chocolate bar, and has promised him six more in exchange for his showing up. Bruno Jenkins, a rich, chubby, and greedy boy, then arrives and demands his chocolate. Right on schedule, an alarm clock is heard and Bruno shrinks into a mouse. The audience cheers.

The Ancient Ones – The oldest witches among the group, the Ancient Ones, will be unable to find the rarer ingredients because of the hard physical activity it will require, so the Grand High Witch will give them pre-brewed formula in her room, No. 454. Suddenly, an older witch stands up and announces she smells dog droppings – what a clean child smells like to a witch. The Grand High Witch then orders the witches to find the source of the smell.

Metamorphosis – The witches then discover the narrator, who runs. The Grand High Witch orders the witches to catch the narrator. The narrator screams for help, but is captured. An entire bottle of Formula 86 is forced down the narrator’s throat, accelerating the process. The narrator is transformed into a mouse. The narrator runs off while the Grand High Witch orders the witches to prepare for tea with Mr. Stringer on Sunshine Terrace outside the Hotel.

Bruno – The narrator, now a mouse, convinces himself that life as a mouse may be better, or at least no worse than life as a boy. The narrator then comes across Bruno Jenkins, who is eating the remains of a fishpaste sandwich. Bruno is angered at being turned into a mouse, and demands to know which witch is responsible. The narrator explains it is the woman who gave him the candy bar the day before. The narrator and Bruno decide to consult Grandmamma about what to do next.

Hello Grandmamma – The narrator and Bruno startle a chambermaid who screeches, causing Grandmamma to open her door to find out what is going on. The narrator and Bruno then dart inside, and reveal themselves to Grandmamma. Grandmamma is horrified, and begins to cry. The narrator tells her not to worry, and explains everything that has happened to him and Bruno. The narrator wonders, however, how he and Bruno can still think and speak like people. Grandmamma explains that it is clear the witches haven’t been able to brew a formula that will turn someone into a 100% percent mouse. The narrator then realizes that the Grand High Witch’s room is 454, one floor and one balcony directly below his own room, 554. The narrator devises a plan to be lowered onto the Grand High Witch’s balcony, sneak in, steal formula, and have it given to all the witches. Grandmamma agrees this is a good plan, and decides to lower the narrator down in a sock.

The idea that appearances cannot be trusted continues to be an important theme in this section of the novel. This occurs by way of the use of Formula 86 on not only Bruno Jenkins, but the narrator as well. Both Bruno and the narrator are transformed into mice. While they may now appear to be mice, they are really human boys. To the rest of the world, however, they appear only to be mice. This is true of the chambermaid who screeches and panics when she sees the narrator and Bruno scampering along the hallway. At first, Grandmamma doesn’t recognize the narrator until the narrator speaks to her. She is terrified to learn of the plan of the witches.

However, the plan of the witches to ruin the lives of the narrator and Bruno by turning them into mice backfires. The narrator will be able to use his appearance as a mouse to his own advantage. He plans to sneak into the Grand High Witch’s hotel room to steal a vial of Formula 86, and then find a way to use it on the witches themselves. Not even the witches will be expecting the plan, as they believe that transforming children into mice will take away all of their human qualities – such as speech and intelligence. Just as human children should not trust the appearance of strangers, the witches should not trust the appearance of all mice they encounter.

At the same time, another important theme begins to emerge. This is the author’s contention that all lives matter – both human and animal. The author could easily have had the narrator and Bruno killed or turned into something less appealing than mice, but he has chosen not to. The lives of even mice are worth something to him. This is in keeping with the theme of appearances, as even though the narrator and Bruno are mice, this doesn’t mean that their lives are worthless. Likewise, the lives of real mice like William and Mary are not worthless either because they only happen to be mice.

Interestingly enough, to the ordinary reader – young or adult – the thought of becoming a mouse against their will, will seem horrific and distressing. But to the narrator, nothing could be further from the truth. The narrator is not troubled by his current situation at all. His appearance as a mouse, to him, means he can swiftly and sneakily move about – and also provides the perfect way to commit an act of revenge against the witches. That the narrator is not troubled by his appearance is something the reader should bear in mind through the remainder of the novel.