***The Witches***

***Chapter 15***

***Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins Meet Bruno***

***Summary:***

The boy has informed his grandmother that the witches will be going for dinner at 8pm. It is now 6:10, so they have just under two hours to make and execute their plan. The grandmother suggests that they should pause and inform Bruno's parents of what is going on. Bruno has been sitting contentedly in the bowl of fruit the entire time, and he had already eaten more than three whole bananas.

The grandmother puts both mice in her handbag and heads to the Lounge to find Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins. She finds them sitting where they usually do, reading the newspaper and knitting. Approaching them sweetly, she tells them she has "some rather alarming news" (142). She asks if they can go somewhere more private, but Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins refuse and start to get upset with her, demanding that she tell them what she's talking about and then leave them alone. When she tells them that their child is a mouse, they get even more mad and call her crazy, threatening to call the manager. The grandmother takes out Bruno and puts him on the table, causing his mother to scream. Mr. Jenkins tries to push the mouse off the table, so the grandmother scoops him back into her purse and they head back upstairs.

Chapter 17: The Plan

Back in the grandmother's room and with only an hour and a half until dinner, the boy and his grandmother make a plan to give the witches a taste of their own medicine. Because he is a mouse, he is able to sneak into places where humans can't as long as he is careful, so they plan that the grandmother will take him to the dining room in her bag and then he will scamper into the kitchen, find the food that is being prepared for all the witches, and somehow mix the formula in with the food. They know it will be dangerous, but it is their best shot. The boy practices getting the top off of the formula bottle and they wait for dinner time.

***Brief Synopsis:***

* Since they still have plenty of time before the witches' dinner, Grandmamma decides it would be best to try to get Bruno back to his parents. Bruno agrees, since they're the ones who feed him, after all.
* They head down to the lobby, Bruno-mouse and narrator-mouse in Grandmamma's handbag. Bruno is eating. Narrator is peeking out.
* Grandmamma finds Mr and Mrs Jenkins and tries to break the news to them, but it doesn't quite go over as planned. First, Mr Jenkins refuses to speak with her in private. Then, when she explains that Bruno "has suffered a rather unfortunate mishap" (16.32) and that he's currently in her handbag, and that, actually, he's a mouse, Mr and Mrs Jenkins pretty much flip out. They don't believe her.
* So Grandmamma decides that the proof is in the pudding. She takes Bruno out of her bag and puts him onto a table. Naturally, Mrs Jenkins nearly dies from fright and Mr Jenkins yells at Grandmamma. She surrenders and leaves, taking Bruno (and our narrator) with her.

***Critical Study:***

The grandmother's reaction to the boy's transformation in the chapter "Hello, Grandmamma" is perhaps surprising, because she has professed to be a witchophile and to have known many children who disappeared or were changed into animals in her childhood. However, her surprise and terror demonstrates how much she cares about the boy, who is her responsibility after the death of both of his parents. This fact, which was first demonstrated strongly by her willingness to move from Norway to England, means it takes her quite a while to get her bearings while the boy is already trying to plan ahead to defeat the witches. She lets him take the lead in planning, almost as if their roles as adult and child are reversed, and soon they are working together beautifully to come up with the plan to lower the boy down from his room's balcony.

The title of the chapter "The Mouse-Burglar" builds suspense because it can be taken in two ways. The true sense, the reader comes to find by the end of the chapter, is that the boy, as a mouse, acts as a burglar by successfully stealing a bottle of the formula from The Grand High Witch. However, the chapter title also suggests an alternate reading, one which generates suspense for the reader—perhaps the mouse himself will stolen by someone else, like The Grand High Witch or a staff member at the hotel (who would then be called a mouse burglar).

Family is a very important theme in [*The Witches*](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-witches), especially parents. [The boy's parents](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-witches/study-guide/character-list#the-boys-parents) die early in the story and the grandmother must take on the role of both parents and put their interests for their child above her own by agreeing to move to England. Though the reader does not get much information about the boy's parents, the boy's relationship with the grandmother is contrasted with [Bruno Jenkins](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-witches/study-guide/character-list#bruno-jenkins)'s relationship with his parents. The Jenkins parents adhere strictly to gender norms and their lives seem ruled by money and propriety. They do not believe the grandmother when she tells them what happened to Bruno, and they refuse to recognize their child even after he is directly shown to them in mouse form. Dahl is generally quite critical of adults throughout his literary works for children, and through his portrayal of this family he reveals something negative he has seen in English society.

The idea of external appearance masking a different internal character returns to the forefront in the discussion between the grandmother and the boy about his being a mouse-person. This theme was first touched upon in a negative sense: witches look like women, especially through the use of practical and symbolic objects including gloves, wigs, and masks. All of these things help them disguise their evil, non-human interior, making them look like harmless women. However, the theme is now brought back in a positive sense when the grandmother and the boy discuss how nice it is that he can be a human on the inside, still able to talk and think as he used to, and simply have a misleading, mouse-like exterior.

An interesting detail in this section is the fact that not only do children smell bad to witches (supposedly like fresh dogs' droppings), but witches also smell bad to children. Upon entering the room of The Grand High Witch, the narrator says, "There was the same musty smell about the place that I had noticed in the Ballroom. It was the stench of witches. It reminded me of the smell inside the men's public lavatory at our local railway-station" (130). While Dahl introduces a comedic effect by referring to the universally recognizable, unpleasant smells of bathrooms, he also suggests that children can potentially sense witches in a way that parallels how witches sensing children. And, just as witches not being annoyed by the smell of adults, it may be assumed that adults would not notice as much the stench of witches: there is a special relationship between witches and children that is linked to smell, perhaps the most vivid of the senses.