***The Witches***

***Chapter 16***

***In the Kitchen***

***Summary:***

* They begin to head off to the Dining Room at 7:30pm, and, just before they go, Grandmamma reminds our narrator that he has a tail, something he hadn't thought of yet. That will come in handy, for sure.
* In the Dining Room, there are two long tables that are still empty – they're labeled as being for the members of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, so he knows that's where the witches will be seated.

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* Grandmamma tells the waiter that her grandson is sick, and tries to stall by ordering a glass of wine first. She wants to give him as much time as he needs to sneak into the kitchen. When the waiter leaves, she puts our narrator on the ground, and off he goes.
* He sneaks through the Dining Room, passing the witches on the way, and finally makes it to the kitchen.
* Whoa! It's kind of crazy inside the kitchen. If you've ever seen any Food Network reality show, you know what we're talking about.
* A waiter comes in and says that a woman had complained about her meal. So, of course, they all spit in her food. This doesn't really have anything to do with the plot, but maybe Roald Dahl doesn't like complainers? Or maybe he doesn't have a high opinion of waiters and chefs?
* Our narrator is still listening in and he hears that the soup for the witches will all be in one big silver pot.
* Using his tail (like a trapeze artist, he thinks), he jumps around and lands himself on a shelf right above the pot, without being caught. (He's kind of like Remy the rat in *Ratatouille*.)
* He pours the formula right into that silver pot, and just after he's done it, a cook comes by and pours the soup in, and a waiter comes and takes it away.
* WHEW! He did it. Even if he doesn't ever make it back to Grandmamma, he'll at least go down knowing that the witches will all be turned into mice.
* He's so excited (about his success and his new trapeze skills) that he forgets he's hiding. Oops! He gets spotted by a cook.
* The cook cuts a piece of his tail off with a knife. Ouch. But he gets away.
* Unfortunately, he gets away to the pants of another cook who, with a few exclamations of "Jeepers creepers!" (18.35), starts squirming around.
* In all the commotion (including the man stripping down to his underpants) our narrator escapes unnoticed, into a bag of potatoes. When the door to the kitchen swings open again, he rushes back out into the Dining Room (still injured) and finds his way back onto Grandmamma's lap.
* She's a little worried about his tail – and wraps it up with a handkerchief – but they're both thrilled about his success.
* Our narrator gets back into the handbag with Bruno and watches the room. He sees that the witches have just finished their soup. It's almost show time.
* Grandmamma and her grandson have a little conversation about the witches. (Grandmamma has become a good ventriloquist – she can't move her lips while she's talking or people will think she's talking to herself.) It turns out there were 84 of them (85 before the whole smoking-of-the-back-talker thing).
* All of the sudden, our narrator notices Mr Jenkins coming toward their table. Look out!

***Brief Synopsis:***

At 7:30, the grandmother departs for the Dining Room with the two boys in her handbag. As she drops the boy into her bag, she reminds him that since he's a mouse, he should be able to use his tail to grab things and swing around. The grandmother sits down at their usual table and sees two long tables with the sign "RESERVED FOR MEMBERS OF THE RSPCC" (153). A waiter approaches and after she talks to him she quickly releases the boy. He runs along the wall and is about to cross the main entrance to the Dining Room when all of the witches pour in. As soon as they have all passed him he crosses the doorway and scampers into the kitchen as a waiter enters. Once in the kitchen, he hides for a few minutes to get his bearings. He sees a handle sticking out above him and flips himself so that he swings by his tail. He enjoys swinging for a while until he is distracted by a waiter coming in with food a customer has sent back. The waiter replaces the food but then has all of the other kitchen staff spit on it before bringing it back out.

Next, a waiter comes in and announces that all of the women from RSPCC, that is, the witches, want soup. The boy sees them place a huge silver soup pot on a bench and springs into action, swinging himself from his tail so that he landed on a high shelf. He quickly scampers over so that he is directly above the pot and pours the formula into it. A moment later, a waiter pours a large amount of soup into the basin as well and then puts the lid on it, preparing to take it out to the women.

Proud and relieved, the boy swings by his tail from handle to handle of the saucepans stacked on the high shelves. In his enjoyment, the boy had forgotten he was a mouse until a waiter yells, "A mouse! Look at that dirty little mouse!"(p.162) The waiters are thrown into an immediate frenzy trying to catch the boy. The boy drops to the ground and runs around; in a flash, part of his tail is cut off by a waiter. In a panic, he runs up the pants leg of one of the cooks. The cook starts to slap his legs, so as the waiters laugh and the cook yells, the boy scampers all the way up his leg and down the other. In the commotion of the cook pulling off his pants, the boy darts out of the pants leg, across the floor, and into a sack of potatoes. Once things have calmed down, the boy sneaks out of the potatoes and out the door.

He reaches his grandma without rousing any more panic and she congratulates him and bandages his tail. She puts him back in the bag with Bruno, who is eating a roll. Peeping out of the handbag, the boy sees that the waiters are now clearing the bowls from the witches' soup. The boy and his grandma watch the witches and talk together until they see Bruno's father approach.

***Critical Study (The Mouse-Burglar – In the Kitchen):***

The Mouse-Burglar – The narrator is lowered down to Room 454’s balcony in a sock by Grandmamma. The narrator then slips into the room, which smells musty, like old witches. In the bed’s mattress, the narrator discovers numerous vials of Formula 86, one of which he cuts out with his teeth. While trying to get out, the narrator must hide behind a bedpost as the Grand High Witch suddenly returns. The narrator discovers three frogs which the narrator learns the Grand High Witch does not need for her Formula anymore, so she intends to throw them to the seagulls to eat. It is then that the Grand High Witch hears Grandmamma yelling for the narrator to hurry up. The Grand High Witch then yells up to Grandmamma, asking what is going on. Grandmamma explains she merely dropped the sock she was knitting, and that her grandson has been in the bathtub too long. The narrator believes it is only a matter of time before he is found, but the arrival of the Ancient Ones for their vials of formula allows the narrator to escape through the door. He then returns to his Grandmamma’s room, where Grandmamma is thrilled the narrator is okay.

Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins Meet Bruno – There is now a little less than two hours until the witches eat dinner. Grandmamma decides that Bruno should return to his parents, so she puts Bruno and the narrator into her purse and heads toward the Lounge. Grandmamma attempts to explain to the Jenkinses what has happened with Bruno, but Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins call her a madwoman. Mr. Jenkins orders Grandmamma to stop frightening his wife. Grandmamma shrugs, says she did her best, and leaves.

The Plan – Back in her room, Grandmamma asks Bruno why he didn’t speak up to reveal his identity. Bruno says he was too busy eating. The narrator then reveals he intends to sneak into the kitchen with Formula 86, and to await the chance to sprinkle it into the food being prepared for the witches. He explains that, as a mouse, he can now goes places where human beings cannot. Grandmamma explains she will carry the narrator and the vial down to the dining room in her purse, where she will set them on the floor to depart for the kitchens. Bruno agrees to come along and remain quiet so long as he is fed.

In the Kitchen – With purse in hand, Grandmamma heads down to the dining room for dinner. She reminds the narrator to keep his tail in mind, for it can be used for hanging and swinging, among other things. In the dining room, two long tables have been set aside for the use of the members of the RSPCC. William the waiter asks Grandmamma where the narrator is, to which Grandmamma explains the narrator is in bed, not feeling well. When William goes to get Grandmamma a glass of sherry, she lowers the narrator and the bottle to the floor under a napkin. The narrator then dashes into the kitchen with the bottle of Fomula 86 just as he sees the witches begin to enter the dining room. Using his tail, the narrator grabs hold of a trashcan as cooks and waiters move about. The narrator learns a large silver basin of soup is being prepared for the entire table of witches, so he decides this is where the vial must be poured.

Working his way from shelf to shelf, the narrator begins to enjoy using his tail to swing and hang. He successfully pours the formula into the soup, but is then spotted by a cook. The cook shouts that he has seen a mouse. He then throws a knife at the narrator, cutting off the tip of his tail. The narrator dashes away, as everyone in the kitchen scrambles to kill him. The narrator hides in a sack of potatoes, then makes a dash for Grandmamma, who bandages up his tail. The narrator then hides in the purse and points out the Grand High Witch to Grandmamma. Mr. Jenkins then approaches.

The cruelty of the Grand High Witch is demonstrated in this section of the novel through the narrator’s encountering of the frogs. No longer needed for frog juice, these poor frogs are to be thrown out to the seagulls. The idea that all life has merit is referenced here once more, as the narrator is noted to feel badly for these frogs, though he is not directly able to help them. At the same time, many people do not believe all life has merit, as the cook who encounters the narrator in the kitchen tries to kill the narrator by throwing a knife at him. The knife only cuts off part of the tail of the narrator, but it is enough to demonstrate to the narrator that he must be very careful, else he will lose his life to people who care nothing about appearance.

The theme that all endings are not happy emerges subtly here. The reader will recall once more that the narrator is nearly killed in the kitchen, and has part of his tail cut off by a thrown knife. In many cases, main characters escape unharmed from numerous close calls – but the fact that the narrator of “The Witches” shall now be forced to spend the rest of his mouse life without part of his tail is an ending that is not entirely happy. This is certainly true given the fact that the narrator has come to depend on his tail so much for getting around.

While Grandmamma recognizes the narrator as her human grandson trapped in the body of a mouse, Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins have no such acceptance for their son. They both believe Grandmamma is playing a trick on them on behalf of their son and the narrator. Mr. Jenkins, who knows nothing of witches and magic, cannot possibly comprehend at this point in time that his son is indeed a mouse – but this will change later on. Appearances matter to Mr. Jenkins now, but they will not matter to him later on.

At the same time, the reader will recall the scene where the narrator has been lowered down to the Grand High Witch’s room. The narrator is nearly caught when Grandmamma calls for him, which is overheard by the Grand High Witch, herself. However, the Grand High Witch takes it at face value that Grandmamma is merely calling for her grandson to get out of the bathtub. In other words, the Grand High Witch who relies on false appearances to hide her true nature is herself fooled by the false appearance – the false story – spun by Grandmamma.