***The Witches***

***Chapter 4***

***Summer Holidays***

***Summary:***

* The narrator and Grandmamma decide to spend the summer in Norway. To whet their appetites, Grandmamma tells some stories about her childhood summers there: fishing, eating shrimp heads (yummm), and spending time with her brother.
* Then Grandmamma falls ill – she has a doctor on call and their housekeeper, Mrs Spring, stays with them, but the narrator has to wait ten whole days before he can see his grandma again.
* Even once she is back on her feet, the doctor orders that she not travel to Norway – major bummer.
* Instead, they decide to go to the Hotel Magnificent on the south coast of England (which, by the way, is kind of like the Florida of England).
* To cheer him up, Grandmamma gives our narrator two white mice, which he names William and Mary, and he takes them along for the ride.
* Once they're at the hotel, our narrator tries to teach his pet mice a few tricks. Apparently this is not okay according to fancy hotel rules. The maid sees one and screams, and needless to say, our narrator finds himself in some trouble.
* The manager of the hotel, Mr Stringer, is a little peeved. Don't worry, though – clever ol' Grandmamma gets them out of this pickle. She claims to have seen rats in the hotel and threatens to call the health inspectors. So Mr Stringer agrees to let the narrator keep his mice, as long as they stay in their cage. Done and done.
* Actually, not so much. This arrangement clearly won't do for our ambitious narrator. He needs to find a secret spot where he can take his mice out for more circus training.
* After wandering through a maze of rooms – viola! – he finds The Ballroom. It's full of chairs and a platform, but completely empty of people. There's a sign on the door for a meeting of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (which, by the way, is a [**real charity**](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/)), but he figures the meeting is over. If not, who better to run into than a society of child-helpers?
* Just in case, our narrator hides behind a screen toward the back of the room. This is where he begins his mice's tight-rope training. Naturally. (There's a how-to in here if you're interested in training your own circus mice.)
* In the middle of all this, happy as a clam, he starts to hear voices. Uh-oh. Mr Stringer begins to usher in a huge group of women, all with pretty clothes and hats.

***Brief Synopsis:***

The boy attends school in England through the spring and into the summer. He and his grandmother plan to return to Norway in the summer and stay in a cabin on the coast, like she and her family used to when she was young. She and her brother used to go out all day in a boat fishing and visiting small islands. However, just three weeks before summer break, the grandmother gets very sick with pneumonia. She must stay in bed and the boy is not allowed to see her because she is too sick. Finally, after about ten days, the boy is allowed in to see his grandmother. His grandmother gets better over the next week but the doctor still stays that she is not strong enough to travel back to Norway for the summer.

The doctor suggests that instead of going to Norway, the boy and his grandmother go to the south coast of England. They book two rooms at the Hotel Magnificent in Bournemouth. Before they leave, the boy's grandma buys him two white mice, which he names William and Mary. He starts to teach them some tricks, such as crawling through his sleeve and up onto his head.

At the hotel, the chambermaid finds one of the mice on their first day. She screams and makes a fuss and the manager tells the boy's grandmother that they can't have mice in the building. She replies that she has seen rats in the building, and gets him to permit the mice to stay, although they must be kept in their cage at all times.

The boy still wants to train his mice, which will require having them out of the cage, so he goes looking for a private, abandoned room in the hotel to practice with them. He wanders around the large building and finally finds a ballroom. The door has a sign on it that reads

"RSPCC MEETING

STRICTLY PRIVATE

THIS ROOM IS RESERVED

FOR THE

ANNUAL MEETING

OF

THE ROYAL SOCIETY

FOR THE PREVENTION

OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN" (49)

He decides to train his mice in this room, since there are no people around and since, if they did come in, he thinks that the people from such a society would not be too upset with him. There is a large folding screen in the back of the room which he hides behind in case the Manager came in. The boy gets to work training the mice to walk a tightrope by holding a piece of string at longer and longer distances, luring the mice across it with bits of rock cake.

Suddenly, the boy hears someone enter the ballroom. It is the manager. However, the manager does not stay, but instead welcomes the group of women from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, who stream in through the double doors.

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

What a splendid place this was! (5.58)

Our narrator is reacting to the ballroom in the hotel: huge, with rows of beautiful chairs and a thick carpet. How does the feeling of the room change once the witches come in for their meeting?

***Quotation 2:***

"Oh yes," the nurse answered, smiling. "She told us she simply had to get better because she had to look after you." (5.22)

Grandmamma is more concerned about her grandson than she is about her own health. Do you think the opposite is true, too?