***The Witches***

***Chapter 8***

***The Recipe***

***Summary:***

* Our narrator starts this chapter with a reminder that he was in the room watching the witch conference (a.k.a. evil scheming session) go down. (Shmoop got pretty wrapped up in it all, so it is great to have that reminder.)
* The narrator is freaking out because he's worried that the witches will sniff him out, but luckily they're a little busy.
* In all the commotion, the narrator had lost track of William and Mary (his pet mice) and, suddenly, the other witches start to shriek in delight. They see William and Mary and think the GHW has already turned two children into mice.
* The GHW tells them otherwise, but assures them that she'll find the boy who owns the mice – she's sure it's a boy – and eat him for dinner. Ick – and uh-oh.
* Now the GHW must share the recipe for FORMULA 86 DELAYED ACTION MOUSE-MAKER with the other witches so that they can execute their evil plan.
* With screams of "O Brainy One!" (9.20) and "She's a wonder!" (9.25) and "Your Grandness" (9.37) scattered throughout from the witches, the GHW reveals the recipe.
* Some of the key ingredients are as follows: one boiled wrong-end of a telescope; the tails of 45 brown mice, fried; the mice themselves, simmered in frog juice; a gruntle's egg; a crabcruncher's claw; a blabbersnitch's beak; a grobblesquirt's snout; and a catspringer's tongue. Simple enough, right? (In case you want to replicate this at home, but have forgotten what the beak of a blabbersnitch looks like, don't worry, there are illustrations in the book to assist you.)
* But wait. Where does the delayed-action come in? Well, the Brainy One came up with the idea to put an alarm clock in the concoction, set to the time that the child will become a mouse. Brilliant.
* One final warning from the GHW: don't give more than one drop of formula to each child, or the child might change into a mouse immediately, and that would be a bit hard to deal with.

***Brief Synopsis:***

The boy reminds the reader that he was still behind the folding screen this whole time, and that it was very lucky that he hadn't washed in days and that the witches were so distracted. Then, just as [The Grand High Witch](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-witches/study-guide/character-list#the-grand-high-witch)prepares to tell the other witches how to make Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker, there are screams of shock and appreciation from the audience as some of the women glimpse two small mice running across the room. It is the boy's mice, William and Mary! The Grand High Witch recognizes that these are real mice, not children transformed into mice, and she kicks both William and Mary off the platform and against the wall.

With the mice dealt with, The Grand High Witch returns to the recipe. The recipe requires a witch to boil the wrong end of a telescope until it gets soft (to make the child small), to fry the tails of 45 brown mice, to simmer the mice in frog-juice for an hour, and to set a 24-hour alarm clock for 9am and then roast it until crisp and tender. Then, one needs to blend all of the ingredients in a mixer, add the yolk of a gruntle's egg, the claw of a crabcruncher, the beak of a blabbersnitch, the snout of a grobblesquirt, and the tongue of a catspringer. After cooking all of these things together, the mixture will become a green liquid. One drop of this will turn children into a mouse the next day at 9am, though an overdose could turn the child into a mouse instantly, which The Grand High Witch warns against since it could lead to the witch being caught.

***Critical Study(The Meeting – The Recipe):***

The Meeting – The narrator decides to remain where he is so the 85 friendly-sounding ladies of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children may conduct their meeting in peace. The narrator looks through the folding screen at the ladies, and notices they all appear to be scratching their heads while wearing gloves. The narrator is terrified and faints, believing the women all to be witches.

Frizzled like a Fritter – When the narrator awakens, he discovers that all the women are now quiet and looking toward another beautiful woman in her mid-twenties, with long dark hair and wearing a long black dress and gloves. The woman removes a mask to reveal a hideous, monstrous face. It is the Grand High Witch. She tells everyone to remove their gloves, which reveals long brown claws. She tells everyone to remove their shoes, which reveal feet with no toes. She tells everyone to remove their wigs, which reveals bald heads. The Grand High Witch then lectures the English witches about not killing more children. As she yells at the witches, blue spit comes out of the Grand High Witch’s mouth. She demands all children in England be wiped out within a year, or else. One witch in the audience says this isn’t possible, so the Grand High Witch shoots white sparks out of her eyes to burn the protesting witch into nothing.

Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker – The Grand High Witch says that children are revolting, and must be wiped out. The Grand High Witch declares she has a “giganticus plan” to kill all the children in all of England. The Grand High Witch tells the witches that when they return home, they will quit their cover jobs and all buy candy shops using counterfeit money. Each shop will then announce a Great Gala Opening, with free chocolate and sweets for all children. The chocolate and sweets will contain the newest magical formula known as “Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker.” By school time the next morning, the children will turn into mice, at which time mousetraps will be set out to kill them all. The Grand High Witch then performs a terrifying dance and sings a scary song about killing all the mouse-children.

The Recipe – The Grand High Witch announces she will instruct the witches on the brewing of Formula 86, but is suddenly interrupted by two white mice running around. The narrator realizes William and Mary have escaped. The Grand High Witch realizes that the mice must be pets, and must belong to a boy. She announces she will find the boy and kill him. The Grand High Witch then kicks William and Mary, after which they run away. The Grand High Witch then explains the recipe: The melted-down, wrong end of a telescope; 45 brown mice tails boiled in hair oil; frog juice; alarm clocks set for school time; a gruntle’s egg; a crabcruncher claw; a blabbersnitch beak; a grobblesquirt snout; and the tongue of a catspringer. This will produce a green formula, of which one drop must be added to each chocolate or sweet.

The narrator, who has been training his mice in a room he believed was being unused, finds himself in the presence of 80-some women of varying ages. These women are, ironically, not a concerned group dedicated to opposing child cruelty, but are witches in disguise with intents to harm children. Here, the theme of not being able to rely on appearances is very important, as the women appear to be sweet and kind, but are in reality murderous witches. The discovery of these women as witches causes the narrator to faint for a few minutes.

At the same time, the theme of horror working to warn children against trusting strangers also reemerges. The narrator at first believes he is safe in the company of so many women, but as he quickly learns, this is not so. His fainting is a physical manifestation of the horror that he experiences – a horror so strong and a situation so terrifying, it causes him to lose consciousness. When the narrator regains consciousness, he observes a gorgeous young woman whose appearance, like the other witches, does not match reality. She is, in reality, the horrifying Grand High Witch. Her disguise is that of a literal mask that hides her grotesque features.

Interestingly enough, though the other witches may be bald and may have some bizarre features – such as having no toes and blue spit – it is the true evil of the Grand High Witch which can be seen in her ugly and monstrous features. Here, again, appearances do not matter so much as the evil which someone commits. The Grand High Witch unveils a truly horrifying plan in which the children of the world will all be turned into mice – and killed by their parents, their teachers, and other adults in their communities. The appearance of the children as mice won’t mean everything, as the reader knows – though the adults who the witches believe will kill the mice will have no idea that the mice are actually children, and take the mice for what they appear to be – mice.

Through the Formula 86 plan of the witches, the author is able to provide the substance for horror for children. The author drives right to the heart of childhood by frightening children with that which is unknown – such as witches – and that which is known – such as chocolates and friendly-looking adults. Here, children will continue to be on edge as they have already been warned that witches are real, and that the witches are planning to put Formula 86 in candy. The author continues to invest his work with such thrills and horrors, believing they are essential to childhood.

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

We'll have his tripes for breakfast! […] Cut off his head and chop off his tail and fry him in hot butter!" (9.12, 17)

***Explanation:***

Please excuse this interruption while we bring you a little culinary lesson. Tripes are intestines. These are our narrator's tripes that we're talking about!

***Quotation 2:***

"And the beauty of it is that the teachers will be the ones who bump off the stinking little children! It won't be us doing it! We shall never be caught!" (9.3)

***Explanation:***

In addition to not getting caught, the witches actually have a scapegoat, someone they blame for what they actually did themselves. That's smart – and kind of nasty.

***Quotation 3:***

What did you come up with, O Brainy One?" they called out. "Tell us the great secret!"  
  
"The secret," announced the Grand High Witch triumphantly, "is an <em>alarm-clock!</em>"  
  
"An alarm-clock!" they cried. "It's a stroke of genius!" (9.31-33)

***Explanation:***

The witches really admire the cleverness of The Grand High Witch. It's worth noticing, though, that the Grand High Witch isn't much of a teacher. A good teacher would have asked her students if <em>they</em> could think of a way to delay the activation of the Mouse-Maker. You know what? A few of them probably would have come up with it. Instead, she maintains her power by providing all the ideas and all the answers and not letting the witches realize that she's not as brainy as she may seem.

***Quotation 4:***

I was living in constant terror that one of the witches in the back row was going to get a whiff of my presence through those special nose-holes of hers." (9.1)

***Explanation:***

Do you think our narrator is living in constant terror throughout the entire book? Are there moments when he's not scared when he should be? Or moments when he's scared but shouldn't be?