**The Girl Who Drank the Moon Study Guide**

**The Girl Who Drank the Moon by Kelly Barnhill**

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**Plot Summary**

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Barnhill, Kelly. The Girl Who Drank the Moon. Algonquin Readers, 2016.

This novel is written in the past tense and is narrated largely by a third-person omniscient narrator. Occasional chapters are related in the first-person in monologue form as an unnamed narrator tells her child stories about the Witch. The story takes place in a world filled with magic, and it shows readers how witches, dragons, swamp monsters, and townspeople can either separate themselves and suffer or work together and thrive. Barnhill’s 48 chapters in the novel take readers to different places in the world where the story takes place. The three main settings in this story are the sad Protectorate, the Free Cities, and the forest.

The novel opens with Chapter 1, “In Which a Story Is Told,” which is a flashback to an earlier time than when the action of the novel takes place. This flashback is told from the first-person perspective of an unnamed narrator who lives in the Protectorate, and the narrator is a mother telling her daughter a story of local folklore and legend. The mother tells the daughter that there is an evil Witch that lives in the forest and it demands a yearly sacrifice from the Protectorate or else she will destroy the city. This chapter is only two pages long, but it sets the scene for the rest of the novel. Readers are led to believe that an evil Witch that lives in a treacherous forest nearby controls the Protectorate. Chapter 2, “In Which an Unfortunate Woman Goes Quite Mad,” brings readers up to the present tense of the story when readers learn that something called the Day of Sacrifice has spanned from the past generation in Chapter 1 to the present generation in Chapter 2. Readers learn more about the city called the Protectorate. It is a city filled with sorrow. No one in the city can thrive because everything in the city is owned by a group of wealthy men referred to as the Council of Elders. These men are in control of everything in the city, including the homes where the townspeople live. The leader of the group is Grand Elder Gherland, who is described as a vain main who “Liked feeling special” (3). The Elders live a very comfortable life while the townspeople live sad and difficult lives harvesting something called Zirin, which grows in the Bog the Elders own. Each year, the Council demands that a baby be sacrificed to the evil Witch living in the forest.

The Elders enter a home in Chapter 2 and find a mother desperate to keep her child. She climbs to the rafters of her home and refuses to give her child as a sacrifice. But the woman is no match for the powerful Elders, who call in reinforcement soldiers to handle the situation. The soldiers are named Sisters of the Star and they are an elite group of females who keep order in the Protectorate. They remove the mother from the rafters and they take her baby away from her as they drag the madwoman into a Tower that hovers over the Protectorate. This Day of Sacrifice has been going on even before the unnamed narrator told the folklore story in Chapter 1, and the day brings much sorrow to the town.

But Chapter 3, “In Which a Witch Accidentally Enmagics an Infant,” tells readers a different side of the story when it comes to the Witch living in the forest. The Protectorate is correct in thinking there is a Witch in the forest but she is a good and kind Witch. In fact, Xan, the Witch, finds an abandoned baby in the forest every year, and it makes her so sad that she rescues the baby and takes it to village on the other side of the forest where a loving family is always eager to adopt the child. The perspective of the narrator remains the same in all present-tense chapters such as this one, and the all-knowing perspective allows readers to learn what is going on inside Xan’s head. For instance, the narrator teaches readers that the Protectorate seems like such a sad place to Xan that it had “Sorrow settling over the roofs of its houses like a cloud” (20). Xan visits the abandoned babies each year before gently carrying them on a long journey through a dangerous forest. There is a road in the forest but the Elders from the Protectorate believe that they own it and they are cruel to work with, so Xan takes the longer route to avoid the men. This year, Xan rescues a baby girl with a crescent moon birthmark on her forehead. She finds herself drawn to the baby, and Xan takes a much longer route than usual because she wants to spend time with the child and show her everything there is to see in the forest. The longer journey also means that the moon waxes and enlarges into a full moon. Xan is a good Witch that gathers her magic from starlight and moonlight. She usually collects a small amount of starlight and feeds the abandoned babies with it on their journey to the Free Cities where they will be adopted. However, this year, due to the longer journey with the baby and Xan’s growing interest in the child’s deep, black eyes, she accidentally feeds the baby with moonlight. The magic is much stronger than starlight, and Xan knows that she has accidentally given the baby magical powers. It will be very difficult for any regular humans to raise a magical baby, so Xan decides to adopt the child as her granddaughter. She names the baby Luna and carries the child back to her home in the middle of the forest.

Xan does not live alone in the forest. Her adopted family includes a swamp monster named Glerk, who often sleeps in the Bog, and a dragon named Fyrian, who is very tiny and extremely energetic. Glerk is doubtful about the child because he is a very old creature, the oldest creature on the planet in fact, and he is concerned that a baby with such strong magic will be dangerous. Eventually, everyone in Xan’s family grows to love Luna, whose personality leads her to be curious and filled with a zest for life.

Chapter 6, “In Which Antain Gets Himself Into Trouble” remains with the same narrator but takes place in the Protectorate and five years after Luna meets Xan. Here, Grand Elder Gherland’s nephew, Antain, is training to be a part of the Council. He does not fit in with the other Elders and he often questions the indifferent practices the Elders use to control the townspeople in the Protectorate. Antain was a new trainee the year that Luna was taken from her mother. He is haunted by the memory of the mad mother hanging from the rafters screaming out to save her baby. Antain cannot move past this sad memory, and he often wonders what the madwoman in the Tower is doing and what happened to the baby that was left in the woods all alone. Meanwhile, Luna has grown into a feisty five-year-old whose magic is accidentally seeping out of her. Luna is unaware of her strong magical powers, but Xan and Glerk understand the risk they are taking with Luna’s uncontrolled magic and they are fearful.

Chapter 8, “In Which a Story Contains a Hint of Truth” launches readers back to the unnamed, first-person narrator from the beginning of the novel. This narrator begins to speak for the Protectorate as a whole and provides readers with an understanding of the cultural beliefs in the city. She tells her daughter about a castle that used to be in the forest. This castle housed many Witches and sorcerers who practiced their magic. However, 500 years ago a furious Witch forced dragons to breathe their fire into the earth, causing a volcano to emerge from the ground. This volcano then erupted and destroyed most of the planet. Readers learn that this is how the Protectorate was established. It was created as a safe haven for people fleeing from the eruption and the townspeople were promised eternal protection from the evil Witch that wants to harm them. This begins the novel’s strong theme of how stories can manipulate the truth and lead to miscommunication that causes harm. The Protectorate believes all of these things about the Witch, and they never stop to question whether the folklore is true or not. Meanwhile, Xan avoids the Protectorate because she thinks it is a sad place yet she does not visit the area to learn more. Thus begins a huge divide between the Protectorate and everywhere else.

Back in the present narrative, Luna’s magic is causing much concern. Xan visits castle ruins, the same castle mentioned in the story from Chapter 8, and searches for answers about the past. Xan cannot remember anything from her past and she does not know why. She visits the castle ruins and remembers that it was her mentor, Zosimos, who stopped the volcanic eruption 500 years ago. Xan also discovers that Luna’s magic will suck Xan’s magic out of her, eventually taking Xan’s life. She locates a spell that will lock Luna’s magic away in her brain so that Xan can stay healthy enough to teach Luna all about magic and how to control it. This changes Luna’s personality. The spell locks her magic away but it also leaves Luna with memory problems. Each time she is exposed to any type of magic, Luna zones out and disconnects from the world for a bit.

While Luna loses some of her memories, her birth mother struggles to remember her daughter in the Tower of the Protectorate. Readers know that the madwoman has been living in the Tower since her daughter was taken from her. She is under the control and study of the Sisters of the Star, who torture her emotionally and starve her of affection. The woman does not feel mad, but she is scared that she is. She knows her daughter is still alive. She scribbles maps on paper with her daughter’s location marked. Unlike the rest of the Protectorate, the madwoman never gives up the hope that her child survived the Day of Sacrifice. Antain, still haunted by the madwoman’s screams, visits her in Chapter 13, “In Which Antain Pays a Visit.” Readers learn that the leader of the Sisters of the Star is named Sister Ignatia. She is a frightening woman who works alongside the Elders to ensure the Protectorate completes their sacrifices. But the madwoman knows much more about Sister Ignatia than the rest of the town. She acquires magic during her torturous stay in the Tower, and the madwoman learns that Sister Ignatia is a Witch that feeds off of the sorrows of others. She refers to Sister Ignatia as a Sorrow Eater and the madwoman works hard to bring her happy hope about her daughter in the forest to the forefront of her brain and to erase all of her sorrow. When she finally does this in Chapter 16, “In Which There is Ever So Much Paper,” the madwoman causes Sister Ignatia to cry out in pain (131) and leaves the Sister hungry for sorrow she can no longer reach.

Sister Ignatia is angry that the madwoman has figured her out, but she is also upset that a pupil of hers has quit the Sisters of the Star. This is the first time anyone has ever quit and she is very upset about losing a talented and ungrateful student. The name of the student is Ethyne. She went to school with Antain and both of them had crushes on one another yet never approached the other in their youth. Now that Ethyne is out, the two quickly reunite, get married, and have a baby. But the child will be the youngest in the Protectorate on the Day of Sacrifice, so they know their baby will be taken from them. This makes Antain very upset. He devises a plan to enter the forest and murder the Witch, which, he believes, will prevent any more sacrifices in town. He presents his proposal to the Elders in Chapter 24, “In Which Antain Presents a Solution,” but Gherland is very displeased that this journey may reveal the truth: there is no Witch and no reason to sacrifice a baby. This entire time, the Protectorate has believed a false story created by Sister Ignatia and the Council to control the townspeople. If the people believe they are being protected from terrible outside dangers, and if they are fed false stories that keep them filled with false beliefs, they will be easy to control and the Elders will all continue to live happy lives. This is another theme in Barnhill’s story, and the idea of oppression through lies and a lack of knowledge come up often in the Protectorate. This oppressive force is the only thing that gives Sister Ignatia power. The Sister determines that she must enter the forest and kill Antain so that the townspeople remain weak, fearful, and, most importantly, sorrowful.

The book finishes in the middle of the forest, where most of the major characters have converged for very different reasons. Xan is now weak but desperate to make it to the part of the forest where the babies are abandoned. Luna knows her grandmother has wandered into the forest alone and in poor health so she goes alone searching for Xan. This then leads Glerk and Fyrian to search for both Xan and Luna. Meanwhile, Antain is in the forest to murder the Witch he knows nothing about, and Sister Ignatia has followed him in order to kill him before he can return to the Protectorate. The final character in the woods is the slightly crazy yet forever-hopeful madwoman, who has used magic to escape from her cell and her enmagiced paper birds to carry her from the Tower to Luna’s home in the middle of the forest.

Chapters 28, “In Which Several People Go Into the Woods” through 44, “In Which There is a Change of Heart” take readers to the many different character perspectives as they all wander the forest on their own missions yet they are all eventually going to end up together in one place in the middle of the dangerous forest. All of them meet in Chapter 45, “In Which a Simply Enormous Dragon Makes a Simply Enormous Decision.” Antain quickly learns that the Elders and Sister Ignatia have been lying to the Protectorate for generations. Luna defeats the Sister by presenting her with nothing but hope, further proving that hope conquers sorrow, and she reveals the Sister’s cold pearl where a heart used to be. Much like Xan, Sister Ignatia swallowed her sadness down; but, very much unlike Xan, the Sister has chosen to gather her magic from sorrow whereas Xan gathers her magic from Mother Nature. Sister Ignatia is defeated. She is taken to the Tower half as a prisoner and half as a patient. She finds that the Protectorate is completely different. Ethyne inspired the townspeople while the Sister was away in the forest. She learned the truth about the Protectorate during her training, and Ethyne uses the greatest power of them all to rid the Protectorate of its sorrow: knowledge. Throughout Barnhill’s novel, the idea of knowledge as a superpower anyone can have is a strong theme, and the author ensures that the Protectorate’s oppression is lifted when Ethyne provides the people with truth and allows them access to knowledge.

At the end of the novel, the world is more connected. People know the truth and their access to books and learning allows them to feel hopeful and to stay strong against any controlling force. The Elders are imprisoned in the Tower for what they have done, and Luna’s family lives happily in their new home. The townspeople are slowly accepting magic as a benefit to their lives, and Luna is growing into her place as the resident helpful Witch. As expected, Xan’s health fails as Luna’s magic reaches its full potential. She dies “Loving everything” (379) in Chapter 46, “In Which Several Families Are Reunited” and Glerk takes her back to the Bog in Chapter 47, “In Which Glerk Goes on a Journey and Leaves a Poem Behind.” The Bog is where all life comes from and where all completed lives go. Glerk was the first creature born from the Bog and he feels a close connection to his maker. He takes Xan back to where they both came from but promises Luna that he will return one day.

**Chapters 1 - 4**

**Summary**

Chapter 1, “In Which a Story Is Told” is related from the first-person point of view of an unknown narrator who was forced to give up her son in the past, and she is still sad about it. The woman tells her child that there is a Witch in the woods that no one has seen for ages and to hurry up because the Day of Sacrifice waits for no one.

In Chapter 2, “In Which an Unfortunate Woman Goes Quite Mad,” a third-person narrator first focuses on the Grand Elder Gherland as he prepares for the nearing procession of the Day of Sacrifice. The narrator gives a brief description of the city-state which is called the Protectorate. The Protectorate is owned and operated by a group of rich and fortunate people called Elders, and the Elders are led by a man named Grand Elder Gherland. The Protectorate is a difficult place in which to live. Most people are very poor and do not have much money, food, or belongings. They work as farmers in a nearby Bog, which is also owned by the Elders.

On the other side of the Protectorate is a dangerous forest. The townspeople believe that a Witch lives there, and they think that sacrificing a baby to the Witch each year keeps the Witch away from them and keeps their town safe from harm. Each year, on the Day of Sacrifice, the youngest baby in the Protectorate is chosen. This baby is taken from his or her parents and left in the forest as a sacrifice.

This year, the mother of the baby who is chosen climbs up to the top of her home, holds the baby, and refuses to give the child to the Elders as a sacrifice. Grand Elder Gherland calls in a group of soldiers called the Sisters of the Star. They separate the baby from her mother, and the guards take the mother away to a place called the Tower. Grand Elder Gherland and the others take the baby to the forest and leave her there. Gherland’s nephew, Antain, asks questions about the ritual, but the Elders will not talk about it. None of the men want to admit out loud that the Day of Sacrifice is a lie. It is a sad day created by the Elders to keep control of the Protectorate and to keep all of the townspeople frightened. Antain does not know the truth, nor do the common people of the Protectorate, but the Elders want to keep their secret in order to keep their profitable and comfortable lives going.

Meanwhile, in Chapter 3, “In Which a Witch Accidentally Enmagics an Infant,” the readers is introduced to the setting of the forest, where this day of sacrifice is known as something different: Star Child Day. For people who live outside of the Protectorate, in a place called the Free Cities, this day is a holiday when a Witch named Xan delivers a healthy baby to the town in order to be adopted. The family that receives the baby is very happy and thankful for their family addition. Xan is a Witch. She lives in the dangerous forest, and she thinks the forest is dangerous also. She knows that there are mean people from the Protectorate who bully travelers on the road that goes through the forest. She also knows that the Protectorate throws away a baby every year. This motivates Xan to take a journey close to the Protectorate each year so that she can find and rescue the abandoned child. Xan is old now. She has gray hair and she lives in the forest with a swamp monster named Glerk and a small dragon named Fyrian. They know about Xan’s annual journey, but they do not join her.

Xan arrives to the drop-off location early, so she transforms into a tree and takes a nap. When she wakes up, there is a baby crying and waiting to be rescued. Xan is drawn to the baby because she has beautiful, deep black eyes. She takes the baby on a slow and scenic journey to the Free Cities. Normally on her journeys, Xan feeds starlight to the babies. They like to eat it, and it keeps them healthy until they arrive at the Free Cities to be adopted. However, Xan makes a mistake with this baby. She is so focused on the baby’s beauty that she collects moonlight instead. This causes the baby to become enchanted, which means it will be tricky to give her to a normal family in the Free Cities. Xan decides to call the baby Luna, and she promises to make Luna a part of her family.

In Chapter 4, “In Which It Was Just a Dream,” the narrative returns to the first-person narrative of a mother speaking to her child. This mother laments her lost son, but she believes in the Witch with conviction.

**Analysis**

From the very beginning of the novel, the author starts to develop differing perspectives. Each of the characters living in one place believes the wrong thing about characters in the other places. For example, people in the Protectorate refer to the day when a baby is left in the forest as a sad and solemn event. They call this event the Day of Sacrifice, and the word “sacrifice” has a negative connotation. However, this same event is known by people in the Free Cities as a happy holiday, and they call this day Star Child Day. To them, this is a day to celebrate the arrival of a baby who is immediately welcomed into their community. Each city has a very different perspective on the same event. From Xan’s point of view, the Protectorate is run by a gang of dangerous people. She notes that the one and only road in the forest is, “owned and operated by a gang of thugs and bullies from the Protectorate” (19). She is so bothered by the Elders who run the road that she avoids the road altogether, causing her longer and more challenging journeys. However, the Elders and the townspeople consider Xan to be the most dangerous thing about the area. They go through many steps in order to make her happy and to avoid her at all costs.

Likewise, there are two opinions about the locations where the characters live: the forest and the Protectorate. People in the Protectorate are afraid of the forest. They believe an evil and dangerous Witch lives there and they want to avoid ever seeing her (2). They see the forest as a place that people must avoid if they want to stay safe. Xan comes from another perspective. She lives in the forest, and, although she acknowledges that it is a dangerous place to live (18), Xan seems more frightened of the Protectorate. She becomes weary and nervous when she approaches the walls of the Protectorate from the forest pathways. Xan also notes that, “The Protectorate itself was a dismal place—bad air, bad water, sorrow settling over the roofs of its houses like a cloud” (19-20).

Despite the dangers in the forest, the Protectorate is also a treacherous place due to the high level of manipulation, lies, and control forced onto the townspeople—yet another theme in Barnhill’s book. Barnhill uses the Grand Elder Gherland as a symbol of people who are power-hungry. This power-wielding character will stop at nothing to maintain his comfortable and fortunate lifestyle. Gherland bans certain luxuries from the people of the Protectorate while secretly allowing himself to indulge in the same things he refuses to allow the townspeople to have. The short scene where Gherland is looking at himself in the mirror indicates that he is not only vain but that he enjoys having luxury items he knows no one else has. Barnhill explains that many people in the Protectorate go hungry. They work very long hours in the Bog with very little payout from the Elder who owns it. However, while the common people go to bed hungry, the Elders feast on fine foods and enjoy material objects such as mirrors. Gherland likes feeling special (3) and is not ready to give up any of the power he has over the townsfolk.

This theme of the rich few oppressing the many poor is strengthened by the fact that the Day of Sacrifice is all just a big lie that the Elders tell the townspeople. The Elders do not really think there is a Witch, or at least they know there is no person to fear in the forest. The narrator describes the Elders’ thoughts about The Day of Sacrifice as this: “The Witch made for a frightened people, a subdued people, a compliant people” (12). They choose to fabricate this huge lie in order to keep their happy lives. This is a good example of a wealthy few harming the population in order to stay wealthy and happy.

Chapters 1-4 also develop the classic theme of good versus evil, but Barnhill subverts the reader’s expectations by creating a Witch who is both kind and helpful. Xan feels responsible for saving the babies each year they come, and she tries to ensure that she will save them before anything bad happens to them all alone in the forest (19). This is Barnhill’s way of challenging the readers. Traditionally, people hear the word “witch” and think of a person who is harmful or evil. But Barnhill seeks to alter reader’s assumptions. In this story, the Witch is a hero and a kind citizen, while the town Elder and head politician is the villain. Grand Elder Gherland is selfish, fixing himself in front of the mirror he does not allow anyone else to have. He also seems happy in bringing about sadness to the townspeople of the Protectorate, as the narrator tells us, “He rather enjoyed teaching the occasional lesson to the citizens of the Protectorate. It clarified things” (6). He comes across as a cold and heartless man who has little to no sympathy for anyone else around him. He even hints at the idea that he is willing to murder his nephew, Antain, if he asks too many questions (5). He is ruthless and controlling, believing that he is leaving babies to die in the forest in order to keep his personal power and wealth.

The only group of people that cause the Elders to shy away is the Sisters of the Star guards, which strongly suggests that they will wield power over the Elders at some point later in the story. They appear in Chapter 2, “In Which an Unfortunate Woman Goes Quite Mad” for a very short time; it is worth noting the way the Elders react to them as opposed to how they react to everyone else. The Elders see the townspeople of the Protectorate as being weak and beneath them; they are controllable and easy to manipulate. On the other hand, the Sisters of Star are “not to be trifled with” (6); the Elders bow down and bend in submission when they appear. Since the Elders represent supreme power, and a manipulative power at that, it is significant when an entity is more powerful than they are. Now readers are left to wonder what role this group of guards might have in the future and just how long the Elders will remain afraid of them.

The fact that kind-hearted Xan will raise Luna makes readers hopeful that Luna will one day return to her hometown, resulting in a battle between the good Luna and the evil Gherland. The final line of Chapter 2, “In Which an Unfortunate Woman Goes Quite Mad” states that the Elders were wrong to assume that “they would never hear [Luna], never see her, never think of her again” (13). The fact that Barnhill tells readers that they were wrong indicates that Luna will one day return to the lives of the people in the Protectorate. Luna is described as being special. There is something about the way she looks at people that draws them in. Even Xan is not immune to Luna’s magical gaze, noticing that “whole universes burned in those eyes—galaxies upon galaxies” (25). Luna is special, she is different, but she has a lot of growing up to do before readers get to learn exactly why and how she differs from all the others. Of course, now that she also has magical powers, Luna is sure to grow into an unstoppable force.

**Discussion Question 1**

Why do the townspeople of the Protectorate accept The Day of Sacrifice? Why don’t the people fight back against the Elders?

**Discussion Question 2**

What kind of a character do you think Grand Elder Gherland is? Use examples from the book to explain what you think about him as a character.

**Discussion Question 3**

Xan comments that magical children are dangerous (27). Why is this true? What would be so dangerous about being a magical child?

**Vocabulary**

fidgety, fool, sober, procession, cursed, somber, retreat, populace, rouge, kohl, perks of the job, bog, bulbs, wide array, inexplicable, keen, bowl over, insufferable, solemn, shirkers, pomp, bereavement, crescent moon, guttural, perplexed, façade, precedent, implacable, stature, trifled, lore, plodding, broods, swale, decrepit, unencumbered, noxious, fringe, bulbous, plaits, aghast, delusions, perpetuated, fissures, pontifications, stoat

**Chapters 5 - 8**

**Summary**

In Chapter 5, “In Which a Swamp Monster Accidentally Falls in Love,” Glerk—a swamp monster and friend of Xan—does not approve of Xan bringing Luna home, but Fyrian—a small and friendly dragonling—is overjoyed. Soon, everyone, even Glerk, falls in love with baby Luna. Luna drinks the moonlight almost every night, and her magic grows with each passing year. This makes Xan and Glerk very nervous because Luna is too young to have any control over the magic inside of her. The little Fyrian must stay away from the baby at first because Xan fears that either one of them may accidentally hurt the other.

In Chapter 6, “In Which Antain Gets Himself in Trouble,”Gherland’s nephew Antain is still training to be an Elder. The other Elders treat him badly. He cannot stop thinking about Luna’s mother locked away in the Tower, and he does not like working with the Elders very much. His teacher gives him good grades regardless of the quality of his work. Gherland appears to Antain at the school and wants to talk to him. He warns his nephew that the Elders know Antain is not a typical Elder. They do not approve of his timid and nice behavior. Gherland encourages him to change his behavior, and he even requests that Antain force a townsperson to grovel (48). However, when the Day of Sacrifice comes and Antain is absent. In light of this, the Elders conclude that Antain must be dealt with (49).

In Chapter 7, “In Which a Magical Child Is More Trouble by Half,” Luna grows to be five years old, and her magic has grown every year. Luna makes the journey to the Free Cities with Xan almost every year. This year, while Luna is five, her magic comes out without her even knowing it. Luna picks up a ball of bread dough from a bowl on a table and tells Xan that it is a hat. Xan asks her to play outside and Luna does. Later, Xan looks into the bowl and finds a silver and blue hat. Luna made it with her magic (54). Luna walks through the town with Xan and unknowingly spreads her magic all around.

Throughout the novel, a number of chapters are told from the perspective of the same unknown narrator who lives in the Protectorate. In Chapter 8, “In Which a Story Contains a Hint of Truth,” this narrator tells a tale of how there used to be a castle known as the Enchanter’s Castle where good wizards and good witches used to live. They lived there in the nearby forest until a mean Witch flew over the area riding angrily on a dragon. She wanted to suck the heat from the earth and bring up enough magma to destroy the Protectorate. However, according to the narrator, a brave wizard stood up to the Witch. He threw the huge dragon into the volcano and the lava eruption stopped. However, the wizard was killed, and the Witch lives in the forest now. She is the reason for the terrible living conditions in the Protectorate.

**Analysis**

Barnhill includes several chapters told from the perspective of a citizen in the Protectorate so as to introduce more points of view and strengthen the novel’s examination of how perspectives may differ among people. This narrator tells stories that he or she believes are true. These chapters share the information that people from the Protectorate believe, whether they match Xan’s accounts or not. This narrator speaks on behalf of all the people living in the Protectorate and allows readers to fully understand just how different the two sides’ memories of events are.

In Chapter 8, “In Which a Story Contains a Hint of Truth,” the unknown narrator’s rendition of why a dragon went into a volcano is eerily similar to Xan’s memory of Fyrian’s mother jumping into a volcano. In this chapter, an unknown narrator tells a tale filled with rage and hatred and violence. A huge evil dragon is thrust into the volcano in a heated battle. The image of a dragon going into a volcano is very similar to Fyrian’s mother jumping into a volcano years ago. Readers know that Fyrian’s mother is dead because she jumped into a volcano, so there is a connection to Xan’s side of the story (with Fyrian’s mother sacrificing herself) and the unknown narrator’s side of the story (with an evil dragon being slain). In addition to these parallels, there is also the idea of a castle being located in the middle of the forest near the Protectorate. Xan lives in the middle of the forest, near castle ruins (36). In Chapter 8, in which an unknown citizen of the Protectorate is telling a story, there is a castle named the Enchanter’s Castle in the center of the woods that houses “good wizards and good witches” (57). When Xan’s memories become partially unblocked, she remembers “a decrepit castle” (56). This may all be the same castle but remembered at different times. Something may have happened to the wizards and witches living in the castle that caused it to go to ruins.

It is highly suspicious that Xan is unable to remember everything from her past, which leads to the concern that she had a terrible trauma, and the recent connection to a dragon entering a volcano established in Chapter 8 leads readers to believe Xan’s trauma is related to this event. Xan remembers that she cannot remember and notes that, “There was something she was supposed to remember. She was sure of it. If she could only remember what” (56). The information presented in Chapter 8 points to the idea that Xan is somehow connected to the crumbling of the Enchanter’s Castle or to the angry Witch riding on the back of a huge dragon. Perhaps this rage-filled Witch was Xan, or perhaps she only knew the Witch, which is what has led her to working so hard to forget her past. Xan also makes a strange comment about sadness, saying that, “Sorrow was dangerous—though she couldn’t quite remember why” (56). While most people do not enjoy feeling sad, it is strange that Xan can only remember that sorrow is dangerous. This may very well have something strongly related to the scary event shared in Chapter 8.

There is a sharp contrast between Xan’s treatment in the Free Cities, where she is admired as a helpful Witch, and her treatment in the Protectorate, which is a place that blindly chose to demonize her. The Protectorate assumes the worst in the Witch. They blame her for all of their problems in the town. This makes the Witch a scapegoat, and it causes her to be feared by everyone. However, Xan is treated with opposite regard in the Free Cities. There, she is admired and people consider her to be a helpful healer. She even stays at the mayor’s house when she goes (56). Here, readers see how the same person can be treated differently in different places simply because of misunderstandings, assumptions, or prejudices.

The narrative foreshadows a potential danger in Luna through Xan’s observations that Luna cannot fully control her magic. Xan respects the power of magic, and she understands the potential dangers lurking inside people and things that have been enchanted. Luna is dangerous because she does not understand the amount of power she has inside of her. She does not recognize it, and she does not know how to control it. This danger may lead to Luna doing something terrible if she does not learn how to control herself. This may be why Glerk thought it was a bad idea for any of the forest residents to fall in love with Luna (33).

Antain is haunted by the guilt of his inaction on the Day of Sacrifice five years earlier, when he allowed the Elders to lock up an emotional mother and to leave a baby alone in the forest. This event turns Antain away from being an Elder, and he does not really enjoy being a part of the elite group. Antain is not a cruel person. He does not understand the need for the Elders to punish and torture and lie to the common people in the Protectorate. For this, the Elders distrust him. They believe that, “By denying access, we give our people a gift. They learn to accept their lot in life. They learn that any action is inconsequential” (43). This is the primary objective of the Elders: to keep the citizens down while they remain high. Antain does not agree with this approach, so he is not welcome in their group. But, as his uncle and blood relative, Gherland feels affection for Antain, and he tries his best to protect him. Despite Gherland being the Grand Elder of the Protectorate, he is not all-powerful. Antain’s lack of motivation for the Elder lifestyle has caused everyone else in the group to want to get rid of him. Even Gherland himself notes that his ability to protect Antain from the Elders can only extend so far (44). This section ends with the knowledge that the Elders will do something to Antain, but readers do not yet know what that thing may be. It is apparent that the Elders are ruthless. They are willing to do anything it takes in order to keep their comfortable lives, and their immense power will probably allow them to rid the Protectorate of rebellious Antain.

**Discussion Question 1**

Why do you think Glerk is afraid to fall in love with baby Luna? What is he worried might happen?

**Discussion Question 2**

Why is Xan treated so differently in the Protectorate versus how she is treated in the Free Cities?

**Discussion Question 3**

The title of Chapter 8 is “In Which a Story Contains a Hint of Truth.” What do you think is the “hint of truth” in this chapter? What is untrue?

**Vocabulary**

emanating, hindered, unabated, evasively, inconsolable, protruding, conical, sumptuous, admonished, incoherence, seethe, imperious, tenacious, convalesced, prattles, piteously, infinite, pliant, inert, undulating, goaded, brandishing, shirking

**Chapters 9 - 12**

**Summary**

In Chapter 9, “In Which Several Things Go Wrong,” Luna’s magic is more powerful than anything Xan or Glerk have ever seen, but her lack of control over her own powers makes her dangerous. Luna continues to transform things she touches without meaning to change them. She accidentally turns Glerk, the swamp monster, into a bunny but is unable to recognize that she is the reason he transformed. Xan decides to place Luna into a cocoon to protect both her and everyone else. Luna is stuck in something called “stasis,” which is like pressing the pause button on her life. This is a difficult spell for Xan to conjure. All of Xan’s spells are difficult now. She is getting very old very quickly and the strength of her magic is fading because it is leaving her and entering Luna.

In Chapter 10, “In Which a Witch Finds a Door, and a Memory, Too,” Xan decides to go to the old castle in order to find answers. There, she finds enchanted stones that help her enter the hidden castle. Xan remembers her mentor, Zosimos, making the spell on the castle. She remembers the day the earth opened up and Zosimos rode off with Fyrian’s mother to stop the eruption. She is embarrassed that she never told anyone about Zosimos bravery and sacrifice.

Xan takes as many maps and spell books as she can carry back to her workshop in Chapter 11, “In Which a Witch Comes to a Decision.” She studies the books a lot and discovers something about the cycle of magic whenever a new person is enchanted. Every thirteen years, the newly enchanted person explodes with power, causing the mentor who enchanted them to die. Zosimos died because he enchanted Xan, and now Xan will die because she enchanted Luna. Luna is already 5, so Xan knows this event will happen in about 8 years. Xan wants to protect everyone by hiding all of Luna’s magic in a place in her brain that she cannot access. Xan thinks this will allow her time to control Luna’s magic in order to teach her useful things first.

Chapter 12, “In Which a Child Learns about the Bog” returns to the first-person narrator as she discusses a creation story that the people in the Protectorate believe. They believe the Bog was the only thing on earth until it created a beast that loves poetry.

**Analysis**

Xan discovers that her current situation of decline and weakness is due to a cyclical process she started and one she has no control over changing. Xan’s mentor, Zosimos, withered away quickly as she grew strength. Now Luna is doing the same thing to her. Xan was a headstrong and irresponsible Witch, traits that Luna is often associated with now. However, the saddest portion of this life cycle between creator and student is the fact that each mentor will die at the end of the thirteenth year in the cycle. Xan comments that Luna, “will turn thirteen and it will go out all at once. No more magic. I will be an empty vessel with nothing left to keep these old bones moving” (79). This understanding is also a moment of clarity for Xan, who now understands Zosimos much better than she ever did as a young child. Xan now recognizes how burdensome she was for Zosimos. She knows the sacrifices he made for her. Xan loves Zosimos, and her knowledge of his bravery on that thirteenth year is something that gives Xan courage in the face of her upcoming death. She does not seem fearful to die, for she understands the cyclical nature of the thirteen years of magic and also of the cycle of life. She recognizes that she has lived a long and bountiful life and is thankful for the time she spent on earth.

Glerk is unable to accept Xan’s death as part of the cycle of life, which is significant considering the fact that readers now have evidence that Glerk was the first living being ever formed in the world of where this story takes place. Chapter 12, “In Which a Child Learns about the Bog” refers to a monster who loves poetry being born from the Bog. These two traits hint that Glerk is the monster that was first born from the Bog. The book repeats the fact that Glerk is very old, older than magic in fact. He is wise and he loves poetry and, in Chapter 11, he tells Fyrian that, “The Poet. The Bog. The World. And me . . . are all the same things” (77). Perhaps Glerk sees the world in this manner because he knows what the world used to be made out of and he understands how different it is now. Glerk does not accept Xan’s cycle of life because she is so very old and yet not nearly as old as him. She is his closest friend, and Glerk cannot imagine living a life without Xan in it.

Readers are getting closer to discovering whether or not the Protectorate’s belief that an evil Witch caused the volcanic explosion is true or false. Multiple times, Xan refers to a “she” who seems to be evil. She mentions a “she” who, “Seemed to hunger for sorrow” (63). This person is the cause for Xan choosing to hide all of her sorrow. Later on, at the castle, Xan remembers Zosimos warning her to hide her sorrow because “She is still about” (72). All of these point to an evil female Witch, an evil female Witch who Xan does not protect during the volcanic eruption. So far, this information matches the story told by the unknown narrator living in the Protectorate. Another fact which is confirmed in this section is that it was Zosimos, the kind wizard, who stopped the volcano from erupting. He asks Xan to, “Make sure they are ever so thankful” (73) for his sacrifice before he rides Fyrian’s mother off to the eruption. Yet all of these matching of facts are halted when it comes to Fyrian’s deceased mother, the Simply Enormous Dragon. In Xan’s memories, the dragon sacrifices herself along with Zosimos, but the people of the Protectorate believe that the good sorcerer slaughtered the dragon in a battle. There are still many wrong assumptions and misunderstandings of the past between people who live in different areas and who do not talk to one another.

It is hard for Xan and Glerk to share their memories of the past because they have trained themselves to forget what happened to them. Xan openly admits that she purposefully swallowed her memories away somewhere, but Glerk cannot understand why his memory is lacking so much. The only explanation he has is when Glerk says, “I think we both became accustomed to not remembering things. We just let things get . . . foggy” (68). Xan agrees with him, but she takes a different approach than Glerk does. Xan’s personal responsibility for Luna and her fast-falling health encourage her to actively seek answers to her forgotten past. “I need to remember things,” Xan declares. “Even if it makes me sad” (69). This is a very different Xan from her childhood with Zosimos. A more adult-like Xan wants to take responsibility for Luna and for everyone’s well being. She is still confused in her lack of memories and she is willing to fight in order to get them back for herself and for her tiny community.

Xan’s drastic changes to Luna’s life and magical abilities may very well change her forever. Although Luna’s instruction proves to be an “impossible task” (62), she is still a kind-hearted girl who has no idea of the magic she has inside of her. In fact, Luna does not even understand that she has any active magic at all. She is unable to identify that she is the reason why Glerk changed into a bunny. Luna is active and fun-loving and excited by everything. She is a happy child with no cares in the world. This section ends before readers get to see Luna after the cocoon, but Glerk is concerned and he is a wise, old creature. It is likely that Glerk’s years of experience on earth have led him to fear something that is likely to happen. Also, despite the fact that Xan hides Luna’s magic in the forefront of her brain as a way to keep everyone safe, this may very well have tragic consequences for Luna as a person. Chances are high that Xan’s love and concern for her adopted daughter may do more harm than good.

**Discussion Question 1**

Is Xan responsible for the volcanic explosion so many years ago? Why or why not? Use evidence from the story to defend your answer.

**Discussion Question 2**

Xan hides Luna’s magic in order to help her focus on important studies more, but how might Luna’s new lack of magic harm her education and learning?

**Discussion Question 3**

Does Xan have the right to hide Luna’s magic without telling her or asking her?

**Vocabulary**

akimbo, enlivened, depleted, dislodge, obscure, confound, interloper, siphoning, druthers

**Chapters 13-16**

**Summary**

In Chapter 13, “In Which Antain Pays a Visit,” Antain visits the Tower where Luna’s mother was locked away. He knows a member of the Sisters of the Star because he worked as an apprentice there when he was younger. He revisits his favorite sister, Sister Ignatia, and asks if he can visit with Luna’s mother. Antain enters the room to find the woman living in a sea of paper birds she has folded. She is now bald and has hung the birds up with the hair she used to have on her head. She recognizes Antain and becomes angry, sending flocks of angry paper birds flying to attack him and leave him bleeding. She repeats the phrase, “She is here” (97), but Antain has no idea what it means. The Sisters do not hear him cry out, and Antain nearly bleeds to death before anyone comes to check on him.

In Chapter 14, “In Which There Are Consequences,” Luna awakens the morning after Xan hides her magic into a tiny kernel behind her forehead. She feels different but she does not know why. Xan finds her in an unusually calm state outside. They begin lessons for the day, but, each time Xan mentions anything about magic, Luna freezes and her face darkens. Xan decides that Luna will never need to know magic because she has hidden Luna’s magic so wonderfully far away that it will never come out. Glerk disagrees and thinks Xan should tell her everything.

Chapter 15, “In Which Antain Tells a Lie” returns to Antain’s story. After the paper bird attack, Antain tells people in town about what happened to him, but no one believes him. This leads Antain to finally gathering the courage to resign from the Council of Elders and become a carpenter. His business is extremely successful and he earns a very good reputation from everyone in the area, including people from outside of the Protectorate. He frequently walks past the Tower, a place which Antain now feels haunts him and his memory of how normal he used to be. He is sadder now, filled with sorrow, and Antain tells lies to everyone he speaks to. One day, he runs into Sister Ignatia outside in her herb garden. She asks him to help her remove the belongings of the first ever Sisters of the Star drop out: Ethyne. She is the girl Antain used to love in school and he still has a small crush on her today. She is the first person to stare right at him, despite the dark scars on his face.

In Chapter 16, “In Which There Is Ever So Much Paper,” Luna’s mad mother reflects on her changed life back in the Protectorate. She dreams of paper, and she notes that she does not know how she receives so much paper since the Sisters never supply her with any. She says that the lines left on Antain’s face are a map, but she doubts he will recognize this. Each day, the mother draws maps leading to her living daughter and releases them to the sidewalk below her cell window. No one else understands that these are important maps, which makes the mother feel as if she truly is crazy and is drawing nonsense only she can interpret. She spots Antain down below and launches a paper hawk with a map drawn on it. Antain reads the map, glances at the forest, and looks up at her. This gives her immense hope and washes away her deep sorrow. At that moment of hope, she hears Sister Ignatia cry out in pain.

**Analysis**

Luna’s mother has lived in the Tower for many years now; she no longer has any understanding of love or time or purpose, and the loss of these things is what helps contribute to her confusion about whether or not she has truly become crazy. Lunacy, a word associated with both with craziness and with the name of her daughter, is a trait that Luna’s mother does now want to have. Yet, she is labeled a crazy person and is locked away, presumably, as a prisoner when she refuses to give her child to the Elder on The Day of Sacrifice. However, when Antain visits Sister Ignatia, readers learn that the purpose of Luna’s mother’s stay in the Tower is to be studied. The Sisters observe her; they try to learn new things from her.

Sorrow, and the reaction a person has to it, is a major theme in this book; and Sister Ignatia’s painful reaction to the loss of sorrow makes her a prime suspect as the evil Witch from the past that made the volcano erupt all those years ago. She loves studying Luna’s mother, and she states that Luna’s mother is, “A rare bird. And a bit of a puzzle. A fountain of sorrow” (92). This does not mean much at first, but her comment about Luna’s mother seems overly suspicious later on when Sister Ignatia is heard crying out in pain the moment Luna’s mother feels, “Hope and light and motion” (131). It is as if her very “Fountain of sorrow” (92) is what kept Sister Ignatia comfortable. Normally, Sister Ignatia’s pain-ridden cry would be considered a matter of timing. However, the idea of sorrow comes up quite often in this book. Also, in Chapter 9, “In Which Several Things Go Wrong,” Xan remembers having the feeling that an evil Witch from her childhood hungered for sorrow (63). Sister Ignatia has special powers, she is the head of Sisters of the Star, and she teaches girls all about potions and poisons and martial arts. The powers wielded by the Sisters cause the Elders to shrink and feel meek in around them. These examples all point to the idea that Sister Ignatia has a strong connection to the evil Witch that caused the almost-disastrous volcanic eruption so many years ago. The largest indicator to her connection being that she screams out in pain the moment Luna’s mother sheds her sorrow away and feels hopeful.

Antain is unable to move on from sad events that have happened in his life, which causes him to feel a deep sorrow that both attracts Sister Ignatia and transforms him into a recluse. He himself is filled with sorrow and regret for the loss of the life he assumes he would have had. Readers witness Antain’s transformation from a positive lover of learning into a shrewd, antisocial businessman. He avoids social gatherings and is deeply self-conscious of his scars. But, unlike Luna’s mother, Antain does not succumb to his sorrow. Instead, he rises above it. Antain creates his own path far from his mother’s hopes and dreams. He finds success doing something he loves, and he is happy being apart from people who hurt his feelings when they wince at the sight of his scarred face. Antain’s personal reaction to his own sorrow is the opposite of Luna’s mother’s reaction, which makes him a resilient person. But, despite the positive attribute of resiliency, Antain still hints at being able to be cunning. He leaves the Council of Elders because he does not like their lies, yet Antain comments that he lies to everyone now. He has yet to find his place in the world, but he knows it is not with a group that is willing to leave babies alone in a forest as a sacrifice.

Antain and Luna’s mother make a very odd pair in this section, and Antain’s willingness to listen and accept Luna’s mother as a credible person is a huge factor in her creation of hope that she will retrieve her daughter. Somehow, Luna’s mother knows her daughter is alive. Somehow, Antain is the only person who can communicate with her about it. The repetition of the phrase, “She is here” (97) seems to others as evidence for her lunacy, but Antain sees it as what it is intended to be: a map to a girl who was taken from her family.

Luna has found a family with Xan, but Xan’s overwhelming care for Luna, Glerk, and Fyrian drives her to selfishly harm Luna while trying to save her own family. Xan places Luna in the cocoon as a form of safety while she is away. However, upon her return, she keeps Luna there as a way to help her concentrate on her studies. Then, again, Xan finds a spell that will hide the magic inside of Luna and she does the spell without careful consideration. These two acts are completed quickly, and against the wishes of wise Glerk. He asks logical questions about Luna’s overall well-being related to these changes, but Xan ignores him and chooses to complete spells hastily and without enough understanding. Even the title of Chapter 14, “In Which there are Consequences,” indicates that Xan’s decisions in this situation were wrong and harmful. Luna wakes up without magic and she wakes up without herself. “Her eyes were blank. Her face was blank. She looked as though her soul had gone dormant, like a tree in winter” (105). Luna is unable to remember many of the things in her recent past, and she is not sure why she has strange ideas of magic. It is sad to see Luna go from a girl who is overfilled with joy and energy and excitement, often to an annoying extent, to a girl who is “dormant” and inactive and blank. Not only is this change heartbreaking for readers, it is heartbreaking for Glerk as well as he witnesses his favorite, hyperactive little girl fall into an abyss of nothingness. As Xan’s time with a caged Luna continues, she grows even more selfish. She begins to think that Luna’s magic will never seep out; that she will live forever because Luna will never be able to truly live as her enmagiced self. This is a self-serving move on Xan’s part because the spell only helps her and does not help anyone else.

**Discussion Question 1**

What does Sister Ignatia mean when she scolds Ethyne by saying, “The girl doesn’t have the decency to show even the tiniest modicum of sorrow for her actions” (125)?

**Discussion Question 2**

How has Antain changed since his injuries? What kind of a person is he now? Is he better or worse?

**Discussion Question 3**

There is a lot of evidence that explains why Luna’s mother is crazy, but what evidence is there to explain that she is not a crazy person?

**Vocabulary**

auxiliary, armories, impenetrable, alchemical, demeanor, proliferation, formidable, sallow, murmurations, prodigiously, prattling, inexorable, contemplate, impending, renown, invariably, terse, deluded, discerning, accretion

**Chapters 17 - 20**

**Summary**

Luna is now 11 years old at the start of Chapter 17, “In Which there is a Crack in the Nut.” The locked up magic is beginning to crack through, and Luna is remembering things she does not understand, experiencing terrible headaches, and seeing flashing blue and silver light when she closes her eyes. She remembers a person she used to call mother, and it makes her realize that she must have had a family when she was a baby. Luna remembers Gherland and her parents and her home and Antain, although she does not know who these people are or why she is remembering them. This makes Luna feel frustrated and angry. She loves to read, but she feels confused when she is unable to read certain books in Xan’s workshop. Luna begins drawing instead. She sketches images of a tower and a city with many cold stones. She draws maps just like her mother does, although Luna does not know this similarity.

In Chapter 18, “In Which a Witch Is Discovered,” Xan continues to make journeys between the Protectorate and the Free Cities, but, as Luna ages, Xan’s magic begins to wither and her health gets worse. Her journeys are more difficult now than ever before. One journey is much different than before because Xan runs into Antain in the forest while she retrieves the baby. Antain goes there in order to reason with the Witch and to ask her to stop taking the babies from town. However, he scares Xan and she reacts with strong magic, causing Antain to fly back while Xan transforms into a bird and flies away with the baby. Antain is married to Ethyne, but they do not want to have a baby unless they can be sure that there will no longer be any Days of Sacrifice. They do not want to go through the pain of losing a child. Before entering the forest, Antain attended the Day of Sacrifice ceremony in town. He has a negative opinion of his Uncle Gherland, but little does Antain know that Gherland misses his nephew terribly. Like Xan, his health is fading quickly and he has problems carrying the baby through town.

In Chapter 19, “In Which There Is a Journey to the Town of Agony,” time has fast-forwarded again and Luna is now 12 years old. Luna’s temper has escalated with the onset of adolescence and Luna often snaps at her friends, including Xan, whom she calls Grandmama. Luna accompanies Xan on her next visit to the Free Cities and along the way, Xan becomes weak and ill. Luna runs ahead to the town called Misery and fetches a widow and villagers to tend to Xan. Xan and Luna spend the night at the mayor’s home before departing into the forest.

In Chapter 20, “In Which Luna Tells a Story,” the narrative style takes a distinct turn from the previous chapters. This tale is related from Luna’s first-person perspective and is addressed to Fyrian. The story centers on a girl with no memory and concludes with, “Yes. This is all one story. This is my story. I don’t know how it ends” (166).

**Analysis**

The importance of memories is greatly emphasized in this section of the novel. Several of the characters struggle with their own recollections of events and try to work out the puzzle pieces floating around in their minds. Luna is at the forefront of characters who struggle with memories in this section. She cannot remember her past because Xan’s spell to lock away her magic had a terrible consequence. However, Luna’s magic begins to break through in her mind, which causes cracks in her memory to seep through as well. Her memories go all the way back to when she was an infant being given away to the Grand Elder Gherland. When Luna shares these memories with Xan, her grandmother sloughs them off and tells Luna that she knows everyone she has ever met. If Xan does not know the people Luna remembers then they must be a dream and not a memory of a true event. Xan is wrong here. She does not know the people Luna remembers because Luna’s memories are from a time when Xan did not know Luna. Xan has never stepped foot in the Protectorate, so she does not know what goes on or why Luna remembers being carried away from her mother by a man in a swishy robe. Like Luna, Xan also struggles to remember her past. Xan also has a block related to her past, and she only remembers small slivers of things from long ago. This makes Xan powerless in a way that she is normally not. She is shown as an all-powerful Witch who uses her powers to overcome illness and struggle. In this case, though, Xan is powerless to completely help people because she does not understand what is going on. Luna’s mother, referred to only as a madwoman, is experiencing strange comings and goings of memories. She remembers being a daughter and being a mother, but she cannot recall how she has acquired these magical gifts and she does not understand why she has the memory of Xan’s home in the forest since she has never been in the forest. She knows things that she cannot explain and she remembers places she knows she has never been. Lastly, Antain is haunted by his memory of his first Day of Sacrifice. He has never been able to forget the sounds of Luna’s mother clinging to her baby up in the rafters. This memory, and the fear that Ethyne will end up like that, is why they choose not to have a child. Antain cannot afford to be haunted by the memory of the madwoman while celebrating the life of his child, so he avoids the happiness of having a baby with his wife.

Luna’s magic is an unstoppable force inside of her, and it is likely to help Luna feel like herself again. She has felt different and strange since the day she woke up after having her magic stripped from her mind. Now that Luna’s magic begins to seep out into the world, her own personal identification comes out as well. She begins to feel slightly more like herself, and she begins to remember more things about who she truly is. However, the fact that these special things have been trapped inside of her for so long makes it difficult for Luna to process her thoughts. She still loves the moon, and the narrator says of Luna, “She wanted to gather every morsel of moonlight into a great bowl and drink it dry” (133). She does not know why she feels this way, but she knows she has the strong urge to be next to moonlight. Luna also indicates that somewhere deep inside of her mind she understands that her and her magic are ticking away toward something dangerous. She realizes that, “Each click brings me closer to the close” (138). Here, this is the word close as in closing a door, not as in proximity to something. Luna knows that she is growing up to a close of something, but then she quickly questions, “Why would she think that?” (138). This shows Luna’s ability to interpret things and to remember her memories, but it also shows that she is unable to fully understand them right now. This, of course, was not Xan’s intention, but it is the consequence for Xan living a healthier end to her life.

Although she is unaware of this, a large part of Xan’s identity is ensuring that she is completely different from the evil, sorrow-eating Witch mentioned in the book. Xan struggles to accept the end of her life and she takes the time to reflect on her past actions and ensure that she truly is as good of a person as she believes she is. She thinks of the many people she has helped in the Free Cities and notes that she has helped people “In preparation for that journey into the unknown” (141). Xan is comforting herself with the thought that she has lived her life with the purpose of helping others, a habit she has successfully followed everywhere but one place. Xan avoids the Protectorate because of the cloud of sorrow and the danger she feels when she nears its borders. And yet, she feels guilty for avoiding this sorrow and for not trying to alleviate some of the pain present there. “And here are these poor people—men and women and children—that you have refused to help,” she thinks to herself while standing in view of the Protectorate. “What do you have to say for yourself, you silly woman?” (142). Xan wants to feel like she is a good, kind, and helpful person; however she feels as though she has let the people of the Protectorate down. She will not feel ready to die until she proves to herself that she is a much nicer and more helpful person than the evil Witch

Readers do not have direct evidence as to who the Witch is, but clues in the story continue to indicate that Sister Ignatia is the Witch that erupted the volcano, thrives off of sorrow, and murdered Zosimos. Evidence in Chapter 9, “In Which Several Things Go Wrong” connected Xan’s memories to Sister Ignatia. Now, in Chapter 18, “In Which a Witch is Discovered,” the madwoman names Sister Ignatia a “Sorrow Eater” (144) and she comments that the Sister has “gorged herself on sorrow” (144) for years. This description of Sister Ignatia as a woman with many talents and powers is consistent with yet another one of Xan’s memory when she recalls a woman sitting outside of her bedroom requesting more sorrow from Xan’s nightly dreams of terror (142). Xan has two flashbacks in Chapter 9 about a female presence in her childhood who fed off of sorrow, stating that she “Seemed to hunger for sorrow” (63) and that she was out there hunting for more sorrow (72). All of this evidence strongly indicates that Sister Ignatia terrorized Xan in her childhood to the point that Zosimos protected her by enmagicing Xan, despite his knowledge that it meant he would sacrifice his life for Xan later on.

There are more similarities between Sister Ignatia and the Elders than previously thought because both parties are willing to harm others if it means they get to maintain their ideal lifestyles. The Sister takes many steps in order to keep the area filled with sorrow, ensuring that her life remains comfortable for her while disregarding the happiness of the townspeople. To begin, she moves the Tower from the castle in Xan’s childhood memories to the Protectorate. She works with the Elders to keep the townspeople sorrowful, weak, and unquestioning. She trains girls to have powers that will continue her lifestyle and studies. Going all the way back to Chapter 2, “In Which an Unfortunate Woman Goes Quite Mad,” the Elders are seen as cowering in fear of the Sisters of the Star. The narrator describes the Elders’ reaction as displaying the fact they knew the Sisters are a force, “Not to be trifled with” (6). This indicates the power and now magic of the Sisters, a group led by Sister Ignatia the Sorrow Eater.

**Discussion Question 1**

Why do you think Xan’s health is failing if Luna’s magic is safely locked away?

**Discussion Question 2**

It is obvious that Sister Ignatia needs sorrow in order to remain strong. How do Sister Ignatia and the Elders ensure that the Protectorate remains a sorrowful place?

**Discussion Question 3**

Discuss how the final sentences of Chapter 20 relate to the overall plot of the book. (“And the things that they did not speak of began to outweigh the things that they did. Each secret, each unspoken thing was round and hard and heavy and cold, like a stone hung around the necks of both grandmother and girl. Their backs bent under the weight of secrets” (164).)

**Vocabulary**

galling, infinitely, obfuscate, pertained, anguish, porous, relish, chastised, predatory, boorish, gravitas, ingrate, contraptions, peevish, vexing, bulbous, tenacious

**Chapters 21 - 24**

**Summary**

In Chapter 21, “In Which Fyrian Makes a Discovery,” Fyrian has what he thinks is a nightmare. He wakes alone deep in the forest with no memory as to how he got there. He sees a house and a pair of tiny boots. Just then, he hears growling come from behind a tree. He is scared and shouts Luna’s name three times, which yanks him out of the forest and back into bed with Luna. She assures him that it was only a dream, but Luna finds black boots in the house the next morning. There is an inscription on the boots that read, “Do not wear us unless you mean it” (179). Luna puts them away in a box in her house.

These are the same boots discussed in Chapter 22, “In Which There is Another Story.” The still unnamed narrator living in the Protectorate tells a child about the Witch’s Seven League Boots (181), which enable the Witch to travel very fast and help her steal magic faster than anyone else.

In Chapter 23, “In Which Luna Draws a Map,” Luna continues on with the chores for the day. She comes across a crow staring directly at her in the forest, and she remembers that this crow has visited her and spoken with her before. The crow leads Luna to a clearing where she is looking in the direction of the Protectorate. She begins to draw but goes into a trance for hours, which scares Fyrian a lot. Luna returns home and reviews her pictures. She sketched a perfect map to the Protectorate, despite the fact that she does not know of the location. Inside, she sketched the Tower and a paper bird coming from the top with the words, “She is here” (196) written next to the bird.

In Chapter 24, “In Which Antain Presents a Solution,” Antain visits his Uncle Gherland and requests permission to thank the Council for their training so many years ago. But this is a lie. Ethyne is pregnant. Due to the timing of the baby’s birth, it is sure that their baby will be sacrificed. Antain shows the Elder the map he received from the madwoman and announces that he will use this map to enter the forest and kill the Witch.

**Analysis**

The book's theme revolving around the pain caused by forgetting important memories is extended even further when Fyrian struggles through a confusing breakthrough of his past, which indicates to readers that either Xan or Zosimos placed controls on Fyrian’s memories. Thus far, Fyrian has been a simple, one-sided character. He has no sorrow or pain, and the only issue he seems to have is the lie everyone tells him about his small size in the so-called land of giants. Fyrian’s dream is actually a flashback. It is an awakening into a past he has forgotten or into memories someone has erased. The flashback is pretty straightforward, but the confusing nature of Fyrian’s size is something to look further into. In his reality, Fyrian is as small as a bird. Everyone is aware that this makes him a tiny dragon, but Fyrian is unaware of this fact. However, in his flashback, Fyrian is a huge dragon with a massive body much bigger than a house. Fyrian believes he has left the supposed land of giants, which is why he seems too large in comparison to the home he sees, but in reality it is Fyrian who has changed sizes. One might argue that Fyrian grew in size because he took on the stance of his mother, a large and beautiful dragon. However, this is not likely because Fyrian describes his mother’s gorgeous, scaly body before the flashback and he does not note any of those same traits in his flashback. This, then, hints at the idea that Fyrian was once a large dragon. While there is no direct evidence for this, readers now know for certain that Fyrian’s memories have been wiped. There is evidence that when a character has his or her memory wiped it changes that person dramatically. Xan shrinks Luna’s magic into a tiny grain of sand and alters her grasp on her memories. It is possible that someone locked away Fyrian’s memories with the unplanned consequence of shrinking him. Fyrian’s memories related to being a large dragon might also be part of what a person blocked. A second possibility for how Fyrian was shrunk from a large dragon to a small dragon is that someone hurt him or punished him, resulting in his small size and childlike nature. For his own protection, it is possible that a magic spell was placed on Fyrian in order to prevent him from remembering this trauma in his life.

This section also transforms Fyrian from the light-hearted dragon that relieves emotional pressure to a saddened dragon with a depressing past; leaving readers without any completely “happy” characters. Previously, readers knew that Fyrian’s presence in a scene meant upcoming adorable and happy comments. While Fyrian’s personality is not likely to change, the introduction of Fyrian as a troubled character alters readers’ perceptions of him and slightly changes the mood of the story as well. The realization of Fyrian’s past puts him in a position where he is very similar to Luna, who is also Xan’s adopted ward and struggles with her place in a family unit.

Antain becomes hypocritical in his quest for saving his own lifestyle, which makes him no better than the Council he judged so harshly many years ago. Antain left the Council because he could not stand their lies. He felt nobler and more honest than them. However, Antain has succumbed to the same greed the Elders have: a greed to keep one’s personal lifestyle intact. The Elders lie and manipulate the townspeople in order to stay happy. They love their large homes and their gourmet food. Antain, on the other hand, loves his wife and his unborn baby. Like the Elders, he is willing to kill for his personal happiness. In this respect, Antain is no more ethical than the Elders he still judges. In his mind, the Council sacrifices babies, but now Antain has no problem sacrificing a Witch in order to keep his life the way he wants it. This is a surprising change for Antain, who, up until this point has seemed rather kind and straightforward. This is a reference to how some of the Elders have allowed themselves transform as well.

**Discussion Question 1**

What reasons does Xan have for erasing Fyrian’s memory to protect him?

**Discussion Question 2**

It has previously been discussed that Sister Ignatia is the evil witch who caused the volcano to erupt many years ago. However, how does the description of the witch in Chapter 22, “In Which There is Another Story,” imply that the boots might belong to Xan?

**Discussion Question 3**

How does Antain’s decision to kill the Witch as a means of saving his baby make him equally as immoral as the members of the Council?

**Vocabulary**

vouch, belligerent, chided, abated, malevolence, elude, conspired, complied, abashed, petulant, prodigious, chortling, forthcoming, tyranny, convoluted

**Chapters 25 - 28**

**Summary**

In Chapter 25, “In Which Luna Learns a New Word,” Luna awakens with terrible pain in her head followed by clarity and an acquisition of her magic. She travels to the old castle and enters the castle though one of the enchanted stones labeled “Don’t forget” (207). There, she finds numerous pieces of paper with illegible notes. Luna’s magic breaks just free enough to read the word magic and speak it out loud for the first time since she was five.

In Chapter 26, “In Which a Madwoman Learns a Skill and Puts It to Use,” the madwoman continues to develop her magic skills. She learns how to transform into small animals. She transforms into a beetle and scurries into Sister Ignatia’s office, where she is meeting with Grand Elder Gherland. The town has heard of Antain’s plan to kill the Witch and end her torment, which gives hope to the people. This reduces their sorrow, and Sister Ignatia appears to be starving from the lack of it. They do not want the people of the Protectorate to find out that there is no Witch in the forest, so they agree that Sister Ignatia will murder Antain while he is in the woods.

In Luna’s narrative in Chapter 27, “In Which Luna Learns More than She Wished,” she studies the papers as quickly as she can. Luna learns that Xan was a lost and orphaned girl in the woods. Wizards and witches brought her in for experimentation. They wanted to see if they could put enough magic into young Xan that she could actually become magic. Zosimos was opposed to this experimentation, so he bound the two of them together, which is when Zosimos started losing his health.

In Chapter 28, “In Which Several People Go into the Woods,” Antain leaves on his journey to kill the Witch the day after his son, Luken, is born. The madwoman watches him depart, but she does not want him to go alone because the Witch will be coming after him. She uses magic to convert her bars to paper and her paper birds carry her from the cell safely down to the road below.

**Analysis**

Although Luna is struggling with her personal viewpoint of who she is in her family unit and where she stands in the world, she cannot handle the severe pain caused by the understanding that Xan is lying to her about her health. This causes Luna to distance herself from her family as a form of protecting herself. However, despite the fact that Luna knows she is changing her relationship with her family as a means of protection, she is not yet fully aware of what she thinks she needs protection from. She mentions only that she loves them but has questions, which they do not answer (169). It is the not knowing that makes Luna the most afraid. She feels mature enough to know everything. She wants to learn everything, yet she also knows that Glerk and Xan keep information from her. Luna’s form of protection in the form of distance and lies is done out of anger more than fear. This crisis is also brought on by a combination of Luna’s maturity into puberty, her magic leakage, and her self-comparisons to Fyrian’s experience with the loss of his mother. Her perception of the world is changing and Luna is not sure how to handle it. Unfortunately, none of the people in her social circle are helping her through her confusion. This makes Luna take risks that she would not normally take. She wanders farther into the forest. She wonders about the unexplored land off in the distance that leads to the Protectorate. Luna is desperate for answers and is willing to risk her safety in order to find them. It is no surprise, then, that this scene is where Luna draws direct connections to her birth mother, known as the madwoman in the Tower. Luna draws maps to her mother just as her mother draws maps to her. The two women are deeply connected, and, it seems, they are connected by strong magic.

Luna’s magic is fighting against the spell in an effort to help her become complete again. She is willful and is trying to break into something deep inside of her. Her magic is a part of her. It wants to help her succeed and feel fulfilled. It is a part of her personality and a section of her soul, so it makes sense that it would act out aggressively in order to help Luna during a time when she feels so very frustrated with her family and with a world that does not recognize her as an adult.

Luna’s desire for answers is also her desire to get to know herself, which requires looking inside her soul. This searching leads to her magic breaking through and contributes to her risky trip to the castle ruins. Here, her magic continues to fight Xan’s spell. Luna is determined to find her own answers because no one will talk to her, and her determination leads her to a room filled with spells.

The more Xan remembers about her past the more she realizes just how dishonorable she has been in regards to Zosimos and his efforts. When sacrificing himself for the good of the surrounding villages, Zosimos asks them to make sure the people are thankful for his sacrifice (73). In other words, he wants Xan to tell the people about his honorable actions. But Xan never tells the villagers about Zosimos’ bravery. She never clears his name nor does she share information that witches should not be feared. Xan’s exploration into her past proves to her that she is not as kindhearted as she once thought. This is deeply troublesome to Xan because she places a large part of her identity on being a good Witch that helps people. Now Xan comes to realize that she has never tried to help anyone in the sorrowful Protectorate nor has she ever helped Zosimos be remembered as the brave and noble person he truly was. Xan has not fulfilled her duties to the man who sacrificed himself for her safety, and this makes it difficult for Xan to accept her upcoming death.

Although Xan has not fulfilled her promises to Zosimos or the other wizards and witches, she will have the chance to battle the Sorrow Eater later in the book and defeat the evil that sits over the Protectorate. Luna comes across the hope for Xan and her magic to defeat Sister Ignatia. “We only hope that when she meets the Sorrow Eater again, our girl is older, stronger, and more sure of herself” a book in the castle states. “We only hope that, after our sacrifice, she will know what to do” (223). But Xan has no idea what to do, and, unfortunately for everyone involved on the “good” side, Xan is now too weak to fight anyone. She is not prepared, as the past wizards once hoped. Xan is not ready and she is not strong. Luna, on the other hand, is very strong but has no control. Together, these two witches may be able to fight off Sister Ignatia and her demand for people’s sorrow.

**Discussion Question 1**

Xan claims that she must leave the house early because of her poor health, but what are some other possibilities for why she leaves without saying goodbye to anyone?

**Discussion Question 2**

In Chapter 24, “In Which Several People Go into the Woods,” Glerk mentions that he has given things up that he enjoys in order to be with Xan. This makes him seem like a sad character. Use evidence from the entire book to explain what other evidence there is that Glerk is a sad character.

**Discussion Question 3**

Antain goes into the woods to murder the Witch, but, based on what you know about Antain’s character, do you think he is capable of doing this? Why or why not?

**Vocabulary**

waxing, ludicrous, undulated, anecdotal, vehemently, prim

**Chapters 29 - 32**

**Summary**

Chapter 29, “In Which There Is a Story with a Volcano in It” is another story related in the first-person to a child. In this tale, there was an ancient volcano that erupted long ago. The volcano again erupted several hundred years ago and it was stopped by a brave wizard who rode a dragon into the volcano.

In Chapter 30, “In Which Things Are More Difficult than Originally Planned,” Luna is in the woods with her new friend, the crow. She is lost and cannot read her map. When the rocks beneath her begin to give way, she falls into a large hole into blackness.

In Chapter 31, “In Which a Madwoman Finds a Tree House,” back at Xan’s workshop, the madwoman arrives on the backs of her paper birds. She arrives but no one is home. She finds Luna’s drawings and realizes that her daughter is alive and is named Luna.

In Chapter 32, “In Which Luna Finds a Paper Bird. Several of Them, Actually,” Luna awakens the next morning with minimal injuries because large, soft mushrooms broke her fall. She reads her map and continues on her journey despite the crow’s disapproval. Luna realizes that her injuries are healing themselves as she continues to travel.

Meanwhile, Xan is flying around lost in the forest. She has forgotten who she is, who she used to be, and where she is supposed to go. She flies over Glerk and Fyrian, who are traveling to find everyone in the forest. Xan cannot remember them either, so she hides from them. Then, with a sudden burst of memory, Xan remembers everything and quickly darts off after the baby who will be sacrificed in the woods soon.

Luna comes across an abandoned village in the forest. There, she sees the ruins of a small tower with many pictures of people who have the same birthmark as she does. There are also images of the story related to the volcanic eruption and Zosimos flying into the volcano with a dragon. The crow is very nervous and warns Luna that someone is coming toward them, but Luna is too interested in the pictures on the wall to move away. Suddenly, the madwoman’s paper birds appear in a large flock above Luna.

**Analysis**

Luna’s two mothers are mirroring each other, with one drifting farther away from Luna and one coming closer to her, which makes for a strong literary dynamic. It is as if Luna is stuck in the middle while Xan and the madwoman switch places. Xan has always been a close presence in Luna’s life. However, Xan’s knowledge of her upcoming death causes her to drift away both physically and emotionally. Xan knows she will leave Luna soon and it is as if she is preparing Luna for life without her. Meanwhile, at the same speed but in opposite directions, Luna's birth-mother, the madwoman, comes closer to her daughter. This is a woman Luna does know of. She has lived her life without the madwoman’s guidance, and yet her birth-mother comes nearer to Luna as Xan begins to leave her. Xan starts to lose her memories while flying in the forest. She cannot remember the names of the people she calls family, which is yet another sign that there is a growing distance between herself and Luna. Just as Xan forgets her daughter’s name, the madwoman learns it. This is a well-choreographed “dance” created by Barnhill. Each woman is moving in the opposite direction. It is as if readers are being prepared to witness Luna cross over into a different mother’s care. As Luna loses Xan, she may very well gain a different mother, Luna’s biological mother.

Although the madwoman thought she wanted to escape in order to help Antain, she is unable to think about Antain because she is so close to seeing her daughter alive for the first time since the baby was taken from her so many years ago. This proves that her loyalty is with her daughter above all things. The madwoman may consider herself to be a crazy person, but she still loves her daughter with clarity and awareness. She has not lost her mind entirely. She chooses to go directly to the workshop on purpose. She chooses to see her daughter right away. Yes, she wants to help Antain, but the madwoman is most interested in reuniting with the daughter she lost along with her sanity.

The madwoman’s clarity when it comes to her love for her daughter indicates that she is not at all crazy. The Sisters and their abuse in the Tower changed the madwoman’s mind, but she is not crazy. This woman has forgotten who she was yet she is aware that her husband remarried. She watches the people of the city and she understands the social dynamics. She knows Sister Ignatia is not to be trusted and she wakes early for Antain’s sunrise departure. The madwoman is anything but mad. She is bored. She is abused. She is forgotten. She is unloved. She is obsessed with saving the daughter she knows is alive. The madwoman is a great many things but she has not lost her sanity. Rather, she is so in touch with reality that she cannot ignore the presence of her living daughter in the forest nearby. This demonstrates her life-long loyalty and her natural instinct to protect her daughter. The madwoman comments that her own mother, and presumably the unknown narrator in many of the book’s chapters, also lost a son to the Day of Sacrifice. The madwoman refuses to believe that she has lost her daughter; she knows her daughter is not dead and she is willing to fight for a reunion. The Sisters want the woman to think she is crazy because it helps them control her. The more clarity the woman finds with her magic the more hopeful she is. It is her strong hope for a reunion and an escape and a journey and an answer that makes the madwoman uncontrollable. This is when she breaks free of the Sisters and their emotional abuse. The madwoman’s hope proves that it can easily overcome any type of sorrow and control. Her hope is all-powerful.

**Discussion Question 1**

Where do you think the crow came from? Why is it trying to help Luna, and can she trust its advice?

**Discussion Question 2**

Xan knows that Luna is special because she consumes moonlight, but what could be another reason why Luna is special even without the moonlight? What happens in this chapter that indicates Luna’s uniqueness in her world?

**Discussion Question 3**

In the last section, it seemed as though the madwoman escaped from her prison cell in order to assist Antain on his dangerous journey. However, the madwoman does not travel in the forest with Antain. Why does she go to the workshop first and not with Antain? What is her goal in the forest?

**Vocabulary**

envelop, duplicity, contaminates, gingerly, relent, evasion, figment of imagination, piteous, lurid, enumerated, impervious, keen

**Chapters 33 - 36**

**Summary**

In Chapter 33, “In Which the Witch Encounters an Old Acquaintance,” Antain is deep in the woods. He comes across Xan in the form of a swallow and, thinking she is a paper bird coming to attack him, he throws a rock and breaks her wing. He then rescues the struggling bird by placing it in his possession. Meanwhile, Sister Ignatia is on her journey in the forest. She uses something called a scrying machine to locate Glerk, noting that she thought she killed him long ago. Sister Ignatia is hungry from the lack of sorrow. All the while, Sister Ignatia is focused on where she hid the Seven League Boots (269).

Chapter 34, “In Which Luna Meets a Woman in the Wood,” Luna continues on her journey, followed by the paper birds. She attempts another stream-of-consciousness drawing to lead her to Xan, but she creates a drawing of a swallow in a man’s hand instead.

Ethyne, Antain’s wife, is visited by the Grand Elder to discuss her son’s impending sacrifice. The Grand Elder is accompanied by two of Ethyne’s former Sisters of the Star, and she convinces them to turn against the Grand Elder Gherland and reveal the truth of where Sister Ignatia is and what is going on. Ethyne learns from the Sisters that Sister Ignatia is in the forest to kill Antain and she loses her temper toward the Grand Elder, calling him a monster for killing his own nephew. Ethyne has her friends lead her to the other Sisters of the Star.

Sister Ignatia meets Luna in the forest and smells her old boots on her skin. Luna denies this, which angers Sister Ignatia and causes the birds to spring into action, defending Luna, who flees.

In Chapter 35, “In Which Glerk Smells Something Unpleasant,” the stench of Sister Ignatia’s evil becomes apparent to Glerk as he and Fyrian continue their search for Xan and for Luna. Sister Ignatia, meanwhile, remembers where she hid her boots. She sets out to retrieve them.

In Chapter 36, “In Which a Map Is Rather Useless,” Luna is alone and still running in the woods, scared of Sister Ignatia. Luna’s memories flood back to her suddenly and she becomes aware that both Xan and she are witches. Luna recalls her grandmother making a scrying device, and Luna creates a makeshift one to search for Xan. She asks to see her grandmother, but she sees Antain feeding a bird in the woods instead. Luna eventually realizes that her grandmother has turned into a swallow.

**Analysis**

All of the main characters in the novel are converging in the forest and this gives reason to believe that all of the misunderstandings about the evil Witch and the volcano and the destruction of happy villages will all be explained. A large theme in this novel is the idea of neighbors believing different things because they do not talk to one another. This lack of communication and questions leads to misunderstandings and hatred. The people of the Protectorate, for example, believe that Xan is an evil Witch while Xan believes the Protectorate abandons babies for cruel reasons unknown to her. However, Barnhill is moving the action of the story to the forest. This area is already considered to be dangerous and now there are extra dangers. Each character is in the woods for a different reason. Each character is unaware of the others present. Each person is searching for someone else, and their movements through the forest lead everyone to search without results. However, these characters would not be placed in the woods at the same time unless Barnhill has a plan to bring them all together. The question is whether the characters will get together in a fierce battle of magic or whether they will calmly unite and communicate their way to peace and understanding. It is doubtful that Sister Ignatia will be calm in this situation. It is much more likely that everyone else will join forces to fight stubborn Ignatia, who is used to living a comfortable life where she is in charge of everything that happens.

The hope that Luna and the madwoman feel is starting to form into a metaphor for how hope destroys sorrow and sadness. Hope is starting to outweigh any other emotion in this story, with both the madwoman and Luna clinging to hope and finding themselves successful in their endeavors. Luna is deeply hopeful she can trust her map of the unknown part of the forest. She remains positive in the face of danger, she believes in her work, and she believes in the map she drew. Much like her birth mother, she remains hopeful that she will succeed. She does not feel sad or defeated. This hope allows Luna to move forward. This hope helps Luna achieve her goals. Also, a lucky side effect to Luna’s and the madwoman’s hope is that Sister Ignatia is starving and growing weak in the forest (267). She has no one to feed off of, so she has nothing to consume for strength. Hope wins and sorrow fades away.

Sister Ignatia’s weakness is good news for the people she is coming after because she is a quite strong Witch who has had hundreds of years to improve her skills through establishing the Protectorate, but the Sister is also likely to be stopped by her own pride and vanity related to the Protectorate. Sister Ignatia cannot stop thinking about how clever she is for making the Protectorate, and she thinks that she never really gave “herself the proper admiration that was her due” (267) for making such a complex place all for herself. She refers to it as an “Ever-filling goblet. All for her” (267). This proves that Sister Ignatia is filled with pride, which is distracting herself from her true mission. However, she also notes that she is out of practice. She has grown lazy in the Protectorate because life is so easy for her there. Now she is in the forest and may need to use skills she has not used before. She is desperately searching for her boots for two reasons. First, she wants her boots because she knows she will need help on her mission since she is out of practice. Secondly, she is a vain and selfish person who thinks she should have everything she wants and anything she thinks she deserves.

Unlike Xan and Glerk, Sister Ignatia’s memories of the destructive day when the volcano erupted is still strong, but someone spoiled Ignatia’s plan that day by stealing shoes from the innocent witches and sorcerers. She mentions that the original plan was for them to have the boots but that someone stole them and, “ran away from danger, leaving them all behind” (291). This is a part of the story readers have not learned about yet. This new information leads readers to wonder who could have stolen the boots and why a person would have done such a thing. The most likely suspects for this are Zosimos and Xan, but it is unclear what their motivations for stealing the shoes may have been. On the other hand, Fyrian found an extra pair of Seven League Boots in the village where people have birthmarks like Luna’s. Perhaps someone from the village stole those boots, which could explain why an extra pair ended up there.

Ethyne has been written as a sweet and weak character, but her visits with the Grand Elder Gherland show that she is a clever and tough character that will use the magic she learned in the Tower to help her family. Ethyne does not seem afraid of Gherland. This may be from her time in the Tower where the Sisters know they are the supreme leaders in the Protectorate. She understands what Gherland is doing because she knows what the Elders want to protect. She has the advantage of her education in the Tower and will use it to help protect her husband. We see how manipulative Ethyne is when she easily convinces the Sisters of the Star guards to give her information and to help her. She is the only character in the story that is part of both worlds: the commoners in the Protectorate and the Sisters in the Tower. Ethyne will use her knowledge and connections to assist the people she supports in this upcoming forest battle. In this way, Ethyne actually has more advantage than Gherland, whose only superpower is being a rich ally to Ignatia. With her out of the Protectorate, anything is possible.

**Discussion Question 1**

The Seven League Boots are sitting there, unused. Which character do you think will get to the boots first and how could the boots help him/her?

**Discussion Question 2**

Right now, which character has the biggest advantage in this battle and why?

**Discussion Question 3**

Discuss some of the possible reasons why various characters might steal the Seven League Boots from the witches and sorcerers on the day of the volcanic explosion.

**Vocabulary**

admonished, veritable, depleting, potent, scrying, foiled, unison, undulating, flanked, galling, peevishly, baffled, insolence, uncouth, modicum, skeptical, precursor, residue, indolent, sated, imbued, chided

**Chapters 37 - 40**

**Summary**

In Chapter 37, “In Which the Witch Learns Something Shocking,” Xan, still a swallow, watches Antain as he sets camp for the night. Antain feels an odd sense of comfort in being around the bird and he begins to talk to it. Antain explains the ritual of the Day of Sacrifice and the belief of the citizens of the Protectorate in the Witch. Xan feels incredible guilt when she realizes that she never bothered to investigate the matter further, or to try and explain herself to those in the Protectorate.

In Chapter 38, “In Which the Fog Begins to Lift,” Ethyne walks through the Protectorate with a Sister of the Stars, Mae. She remembers her time in the Tower and she recalls why she left. Ethyne paid close attention to her studies in the Tower and realized that no one ever mentioned a Witch, which is odd seeing as how that’s all anyone ever talks about outside of the Tower. Ethyne quit the Sisters of the Star as soon as she figured out that the Witch has been Sister Ignatia in the Protectorate all along. Now that Sister Ignatia is gone, the fog over the town has lifted and the townspeople enjoy their first sunny day in a very long time. Ethyne goes to the Tower and tells the other Sisters the truth. She invites anyone who believes her to come with her. The rest of the Sisters are left locked in the Tower. Ethyne ensures all of the doors in the Tower are opened to the public and that the prisoners are released back to society. All at once, everyone in the Protectorate sees everything about Sister Ignatia and the Elders and the Day of Sacrifice clearly. They begin to know that their children were taken to other families and are happy. They begin to hope and to feel happiness until they notice that the mountain is on fire like the last time the volcano erupted.

Meanwhile, in Chapter 39, “In Which Glerk Tells Fyrian the Truth,” Fyrian is growing into an enormous dragon. Neither Glerk nor Fyrian understand why. Glerk spots Luna’s magic over a ridge. She is heading toward Xan’s magic, which he can also spot. Fyrian notices that the mountain is on fire, and they know they must move quickly to warn everyone. Antain notices Luna’s magic hurdling toward him and his new bird friend. He believes it is the Witch and he hides to kill her quickly when she arrives.

In Chapter 40, “In Which There Is a Disagreement about Boots,” Sister Ignatia arrives at Xan’s workshop, where the madwoman is doing chores while wearing the Seven League Boots. Sister Ignatia lies to the madwoman and tells her to give her the boots so that she can carry both of them to safety, but the madwoman can see the past. She knows that it was Ignatia who left all of those witches and sorcerers behind the last time the volcano erupted and she broke her promise to carry them all to safety. The madwoman keeps the boots on and uses them to run away from the Sister.

**Analysis**

There is a likely possibility that Fyrian will die in this upcoming volcanic eruption just as his mother died in the eruption that took place 500 years ago. The timing of Fyrian’s growth spurt seems to match the timing of the volcanic eruption. As readers know, Fyrian’s mother died in a volcanic eruption when Zosimos rode her to both of their deaths in an act of sacrifice to save the surrounding villages. Now Xan is close to her death, just as Zosimos was, and Fyrian is growing quite large, just as his mother had. Although there is no direct evidence for this in the novel thus far, it is quite possible that the only way to stop the volcanic eruption is for the same sacrifice to be made by Fyrian and Xan as Zosimos and the Simply Enormous dragon made so many years ago. It may very well be a cycle of sacrifice that keeps the volcano dormant and safe to live near.

Ethyne is proving to be the strongest protagonist in the story because she is the only character who tries to change things through education and communication, which shows that Ethyne is trying to break free from the book’s theme about the perils of avoiding truthful conversations. She believes in knowledge above all things. She knows she was able to save herself from a life of servitude in the Sisterhood because she paid attention and used her knowledge to save herself. Now she wants to use her knowledge to educate the repressed townspeople who do not know any better. Ethyne is very different from her husband. Antain sees murder as the best response to get what he wants, but Ethyne sees awareness as being much more powerful. She has waited until the best possible moment to free the people of the Protectorate through showing them what is really going on that they do not know about. In this respect, Ethyne lifts the fog from both the city and people’s minds. She brings clarity and hope to a huge amount of people, which is what makes her so effective in bringing about change. This change makes the Elder much more nervous than Antain’s private journey into the woods to kill a Witch they do not believe exists.

It is very odd when Sister Ignatia grows angry about the fact that the townspeople tell a story wherein she is a tiger, so it leads readers to think that she has a true and upsetting connection to a tiger from her past. Readers learn that it is Sister Ignatia who spreads the terrifying stories of the Witch in the forest (329). She does this to keep all of the people afraid to ask questions and thankful to be alive. She is not bothered by these stories because they are all started under her creative control. However, she gets very upset about being compared to a tiger. This hints at the fact that the Sister does, in fact, have a real connection to a tiger. Someone knows the truth about Sister Ignatia. Someone in town knows who she is and how she has the traits of a tiger. This is secret information that Sister Ignatia thinks no one knows about. However, someone knows, which means that someone in the Protectorate knows the truth about her. This threat frightens her greatly.

**Discussion Question 1**

Why won’t Xan transform into a human and tell Antain the truth?

**Discussion Question 2**

Why do you think Fyrian is growing into a large dragon?

**Discussion Question 3**

How does the madwoman know so much about the Seven League Boots and Sister Ignatia’s past?

**Vocabulary**

gullet, keen, precursor, chortled, maimed, concocted, beset, geezer, compatriots, rouse, ambulate, derision, enlivened, unfurled

**Chapters 41 - 44**

**Summary**

In Chapter 41, “In Which Several Paths Converge,” the volcano is about to erupt. The earth is alight and hot and the ground beneath everyone’s feet is shaking violently. Luna tries to run to her grandmother, but Xan tries to warn her that someone will harm her there. Glerk and Fyrian try to run to Luna, but Fyrian feels ill from all of his growing. The crow warns Luna to stop running toward Xan’s magic, but Luna is too excited to listen.

In Chapter 42, “In Which the World Is Blue and Silver and Silver and Blue,” Luna reaches Antain and he attacks her.

However, in Chapter 43, “In Which a Witch Casts Her First Spell—On Purpose This Time,” the paper birds show up and harass Antain to the point that he cowers to the ground in fear. Luna promises to protect Antain. She notices the madwoman wearing boots and crouched on the ground. Luna immediately knows this woman was once with her before the Elders took her away from her mother. Luna does her first spell: she brings Xan out of her bird form and back into her normal human form.

In Chapter 44, “In Which There Is a Change of Heart,” Xan has collapsed and she tells Luna that she is dying. Luna weeps but Xan assures her that she is not going to die right now—but that she will die soon. Luna feeds her grandmother starlight to give her strength when suddenly Sister Ignatia appears. Xan sees her and says, “Hello, Sorrow Eater” (355).

**Analysis**

It seems as though the crow, although seemingly a random addition, has a strong and long-standing connection to Luna leading readers to wonder who he is and how they met. The crow questions whether or not Luna remembers meeting him, but Luna does not remember. Then, when the paper birds seem to be attacking her, the crow refers to Luna as “My girl” (343). These two short lines indicate that the crow is not a new friend, although the bird is new to readers. The question is who the crow is. There is reason to believe that the crow is an old witch or sorcerer who has remained transformed its entire time with Luna. Readers know that witches have the ability to transform themselves into animals and they can remain in that form for as long as their magic permits. Another possibility is that this crow was simply crow that Luna met back when she was five and did not have her magic locked away. Luna used to speak to animals without realizing it was a magical gift. The final possibility for the crow’s identity is that it was once a person but Luna accidentally transformed it into a crow, much like the accidental transformation she performed on Glerk when she transformed him into a bunny. Regardless of the crow’s origin, it is clear that it considers itself to be responsible for Luna and Luna trusts its advice on most things.

The last section manifested as a choreographed sequence of Luna’s caretakers, where one was leaving while the other entered, and this dance of opposite movement continues in this section with Xan recognizing the madwoman’s never-ending love for her missing daughter. Both women are shown lying on the ground in this section. Both women are weak and need Luna’s help moving. Luna goes to both women one by one. She offers help to each of them, and both women accept assistance. Xan shares the sad news of her upcoming death, saying that she has a mother who has never given hope of finding her again. This shows the deep love each caretaker has for Luna and the true love they each feel for Luna.

**Discussion Question 1**

Early on in Chapter 43, “In Which a Witch Casts Her First Spell—On Purpose This Time,” the crow says, “My girl! Stay away from my girl” (343) as the paper birds seem to attack Luna and Antain. What does this reaction tell readers about the crow and its relationship with Luna?

**Discussion Question 2**

What do you think Xan is referring to when she says, “Consequences. It’s all consequences. I’ve made so many mistakes” (352)?

**Discussion Question 3**

Why do you think the madwoman has such a difficult time looking directly at Luna in the eyes? What does this say about the madwoman’s character?

**Vocabulary**

extremities, menacingly, rheumy, grimaced, menacingly, dejected, chastened, desiccate

**Chapters 45 - 48**

**Summary**

In Chapter 45, “In Which a Simply Enormous Dragon Makes a Simply Enormous Decision,” Sister Ignatia confronts the group in the woods and claims that she is preparing to kill them all. The madwoman is very wise, and she sneaks up behind Luna to instruct her that the Sister is hiding a painful memory that makes her feel emotion. Luna digs until she finds a cold, hard pearl where Sister Ignatia’s heart should be. Luna causes the heart to explode and Sister Ignatia’s sad emotions come pouring out. She used to live in a village but it was destroyed. The only thing left was sadness and sorrow for their losses. She consumed so much of the sorrow surrounding her lost hometown that it eventually gave her magic powers and forced her to hunger for more sadness. This is what created the Witch. She blocked her personal sorrow off as a way to protect herself, but Luna exposing her heart means that Sister Ignatia begins to age rapidly.

In Chapter 46, “In Which Several Families Are Reunited,” the volcano is about to erupt and the madwoman offers to carry everyone to the Protectorate where they can warn the people about the upcoming eruption. The now-large Fyrian carries Sister Ignatia and Glerk. They get to the Protectorate but everyone is frightened of the swamp monster and the enormous dragon, so they run away. Luna creates as many protection bubbles as she can. There is still ash and clouds over the area three weeks after the eruption, but most people are fine. The Elders are in prison. Ethyne and Antain invite the madwoman and Luna to live with them. Luna searches for her mother’s name and finds that it is Adara. Sister Ignatia lives in the hospital ward of the Tower along with Xan. Luna sleeps in the Tower near the end of Xan’s life, and she dies with Luna holding her hand and telling her that she loves her.

In Chapter 47, “In Which Glerk Goes on a Journey, and Leaves a Poem Behind,” Glerk visits with Xan after she passes. He breathes enough life into her to explain that everything in the world is connected to the Bog from which it was created. He invites Xan to join him and she accepts. The next day, Luna goes to the Tower to collect her grandmother’s body, but she is gone. Glerk left a poem on the bed that explains that they went into the world and into the Bog. He promises he will return.

In Chapter 48, “In Which a Final Story Is Told,” the narrative reverts to the first-person narration of a woman telling her child a story. The narrator describes Luna as a good Witch. She relates that everything comes from the Bog and everything returns to the Bog and that the Bog is one and everything.

**Analysis**

The tale of Sister Ignatia’s terrible background might create some sympathy towards her, but it is not enough to forgive her for what she has done to the Protectorate. Her cold, hard pearl of a heart has been locked away for her own protection. Much like Xan, Sister Ignatia is unwilling to come to terms with her sad emotions. Instead, both women choose to lock their sad feelings away. This leads sister Ignatia to become less of a human and she views humans as being there for her own personal advantage. What sets Xan apart from Sister Ignatia is where the two women get their magic. Xan collects her magic from the natural forces of starlight and moonlight. She also represses her sad memories, but the source of her magic makes a big difference in the way that she never allows herself to lose touch with her own kind heart. Sister Ignatia, on the other hand, gathers her magic from a dark place. She depends on sorrow to gain strength. This is a bad investment for the Sister because she finds herself growing very weak from a magic resource that can be depleted while Xan’s magic resource is never-ending Mother Nature.

The narrative creates catharsis when the sweet and immature Fyrian does not sacrifice himself in the volcano. This catharsis is compounded when Luna is able to control all of the magic inside her much better than Xan could the last time the volcano erupted. In Chapters 37-40, there was some concern that Fyrian and Xan would sacrifice themselves in order to stop the upcoming volcanic eruption just as Zosimos and the Simply Enormous Dragon did so many years ago. The difference between the previous eruption and this one is that Luna is much more prepared with her magic than Xan was when the volcano erupted last time. There is never any direct evidence that Zosimos locked away Xan’s magic, but there are hints. To begin, the fact that Xan has lapses in her memory similar to the lapses Luna experiences after her magic is locked away indicates that Zosimos did not trust Xan’s control over her magic. This may also be why Xan was unable to save people from the last eruption and why Zosimos was forced to do it himself. This time, Fyrian and Xan do not have to stop the eruption themselves because Luna is capable of saving most of the people herself. This also allows Xan to survive long enough to know that the Protectorate is no longer a sorrowful place and that magic helps them get rid of the cloud that used to hang over the city.

The end of Barnhill’s novel argues that good conquers evil and that villains will suffer while kind people will be rewarded. Antain and Ethyne are good people at heart who have suffered through the sorrowful Protectorate their entire lives. They fight hard to remain hopeful and loving in a city as oppressive as the Protectorate. Their kindness prevails, leaving them with their son and two new roommates: Luna and the madwoman. The madwoman has suffered even more than the average person in the Protectorate. She has been forced to spend a large part of her life in a tiny cell all while being ignored and starved for affection. Her constant efforts to find Luna are rewarded, and readers leave her much less crazy and much more affectionate with her long-lost daughter. This is a nice change for Luna, who would surely be suffering the loss of Xan if she did not have the comforts of her biological mother.

The narrative places great emphasis on the rewards of the moral characters, but Gherland’s refusal to apologize shows the reader that he feels no guilt or remorse for his actions as the Grand Elder. Gherland feels that he has nothing to apologize for. He believes that life was much better when the Protectorate was ruled by Sister Ignatia and her sorrow-inducing ways. The beginning of the novel notes that Gherland “Liked being special” (3), so it makes sense that he has no interest in joining a Protectorate where he no longer considered special. But the new Council of Elders wants to give him a chance. They are willing to forgive him because they recognize that even the all-powerful Gherland was manipulated by Sister Ignatia. Nevertheless, Gherland prefers rotting in his jail cell over living in the liberated Protectorate among the people he thinks he is better than.

The madwoman finally joins the Protectorate as a regular citizen and a mother of the friendly neighborhood Witch, but she is not fully released back into the city until Luna honors her mother by finding out her name. Now the madwoman can be referred to as Adara rather than as the label given to her by the Sisters and their tortuous ways. It is important that Adara re-establishes herself with her original name because it helps differentiate between the years she was assumed to be crazy and the years she will now live as a regular citizen. Furthermore, by calling her Adara, the Protectorate can move even farther away from the oppressive force Sister Ignatia put on the city. The less the people remember about the sorrowful years the better they feel. However, this type of moving on should come with a warning from earlier chapters related to the dangers of forgetting. The only way for the Protectorate to prevent another period of nasty control is by maintaining their knowledge and by always remembering what happened when they allowed themselves to be consumed by sadness.

Although readers know that Xan will die at the end of the book, it does not change the fact that her death brings about much sorrow, which is then remedied when Glerk escorts her back into the Bog of life. This book refers to the Bog as creating all life. First, it created Glerk and now it continues to create life such as all of the Zirin the Protectorate harvests each day. Glerk takes Xan into the Bog because that is where her life began. He knows the Bog well because he is a part of the Bog and he wants to take his best friend somewhere where the two of them can have more time together. Up until this section, the Bog only created life. It brought forth life on the planet and provided a means for creatures to survive. When Glerk takes Xan to the Bog, however, this transforms the meaning of the Bog from life giving to life receiving and it almost seems as though the Bog will be Xan’s afterlife. Readers do not learn of any other person entering the Bog after their deaths. That does not mean that it does not happen, but the only person readers know of who enters the Bog is Xan. This may hint that Glerk is giving Xan a special and unique honor for her 500 years of service and kindness on the planet. Readers know that Glerk comes from the Bog, so it is not surprising when he leaves the note for Luna that he will return again someday. Readers can only hope that Luna will live as long as Xan, have as close of a friendship with Glerk, and one day return to the Bog with him also.

**Discussion Question 1**

Why is stopping this volcano different from stopping the volcano that erupted 500 years ago? Why did Zosimos and the simply enormous dragon stop it in the past but no dragon is needed to stop it this time?

**Discussion Question 2**

Discuss where you think Xan goes with Glerk. Do they truly see the world or do they simply return to it?

**Discussion Question 3**

Discuss what you think Glerk’s poem on page 383 means.

**Vocabulary**

prehensile, agile, adversaries, uncouth, depleting, infernal, decrepit, ingrate, traipsing, myriad, languished, implicitly

**Characters**

**Luna**

Luna is the youngest baby in the Protectorate, so she is taken from her parents of the Day of Sacrifice. Her mother carries her child to the rafters in their home and she refuses to give the child up. However, in the end, the Council carries the baby into the forest where they leave her to die. Xan finds her and carries her to the Free Cities. She is entranced by the baby's deep black eyes and the distinct crescent moon birthmark on her forehead. Xan decides to take the baby on a longer journey than normal because something about the baby makes Xan want to spend time with her. One night, Xan accidentally feeds the baby moonlight. This magic is much more powerful than starlight, and consuming the moonlight causes the baby to acquire magical powers. Xan understands that she cannot give this baby to normal people anymore, so she names the baby Luna and decides to adopt the child as her grandchild.

Luna grows up in the middle of the forest with a swamp monster named Glerk, a tiny dragon named Fyrian, and her grandmother named Xan. She is a very happy and energetic little girl. However, as she ages, her magic starts to come out. She drinks the moonlight almost every night and Glerk and Xan note that she has more magic inside of her than they have ever seen before. This makes them scared because they know Luna is too young to control hr powers.

In an effort to protect everyone, Xan bundles all of Luna's energy up inside a small mass in her brain. This leaves Luna without any magical powers for a long time. This also changes Luna. Each time she hears the word magic or sees anything related to magic, Luna zones out and goes blank for long periods of time. Luna frequently travels to the Free Cities with Xan, where everyone adores them for their healing powers. Xan works hard to keep their opinions away from Luna. This upsets Xan, but she continues to hide Luna's magic from her until she is older and ready. Xan notices that she feels healthier and younger when Luna's magic is put away. Luna's magic is so strong that it sucks the magic out of Xan and places it into Luna.

Xan knows that Luna's magic will explode from her when she turns 13. This also means that Xan will die when Luna turns 13. No one tells Luna because they do not want to upset her, but Luna knows her family is keeping secrets from her and it makes her upset. Luna's magic begins to come out. She does not tell anyone because she is worried about their reaction. Luna ventures farther and father into the forest. She feels drawn in the direction of the Protectorate.

One day, Luna climbs to the top of a rock and starts drawing. She zones out of several hours and awakes to find that she has drawn a map of the forest that leads her to the Protectorate. However, she has never heard of this place so she does not understand what she has drawn a picture of. On her map, she draws a tower with the phrase, "She is here". She comes home ready to talk to Xan, but Xan has left to retrieve the abandoned baby near the Protectorate. Luna leaves her home in search of Xan and finds her in bird form and hurting.

Luna brings her grandmother back to human form, performing her very first purposeful spell. It is at this same time when Luna comes across her mother, who is a woman Luna feels close to but does not recognize. The madwoman helps Luna defeat Sister Ignatia, the Sorrow Eater, by helping Luna find the Sister's own weakness and sorrowful memories. This leaves Sister Ignatia old, in poor health, and with no magical abilities. Luna moves into the Protectorate now that it is a happier place. She lives with Antain, Ethyne, baby Luken, and her mother. Luna acts as the resident Witch in town and people start to warm up to the idea of a helpful and kind Witch. Luna visits Xan in the hospital and she is there with her grandmother when she dies, leaving Luna to be the only Witch in the area.

**Xan**

Xan was orphaned as a young child. She was taken to a castle in the middle of the woods where witches and sorcerers performed magic. However, this was a very unhappy time for Xan. She cried herself to sleep every night because she missed her family. Each night, a Witch called the "Sorrow Eater" watched her through her door and ate her sorrow, leaving Xan frightened and alone and sad. A kind sorcerer named Zosimos was displeased about what the Witch was doing to Xan, so he claimed Xan as his student and provided her with the gift of magic. Xan was young and uncontrollable. She was a selfish child who enjoyed playing with her own magic, and she was too young to care about anyone else.

Zosimos grew weak around Xan's strong magical powers, but she did not notice. The evil Witch grew angry and coordinated a plan to cause a volcanic eruption, which would destroy everything and everyone in the area. Xan became frightened as she watched the volcano erupt. Her beloved mentor, Zosimos, and a Simply Enormous Dragon flew into the volcano in order to stop the eruption. Xan tried her best to protect people, but she was unable to protect everything and the eruption caused much destruction.

This event was so traumatic that Xan has blocked it out entirely. She has used her magic to live in the forest nearly 500 years. She lives with a swamp monster named Glerk and a tiny dragon named Fyrian, who is the son of the Simply Enormous Dragon that died in the volcano. Xan finds a baby abandoned in the woods each year. She knows that the baby is taken from a very sad city with a cloud over it, but she does not understand how people could do such a cruel thing to a defenseless baby. She travels to the same place each year in order to rescue the baby and take it to the Free Cities. There, one happy family is blessed with a new child each year. The Free Cities love Xan. They know she is a Witch and they ask her to help them with all types of problems.

One year, Xan comes across a special baby. She is drawn to the baby with deep black eyes and a crescent moon birthmark on its forehead. She travels to extra places with this baby and delays her arrival in the Free Cities. She accidentally feeds the baby moonlight, which causes the baby to have magical powers and makes it impossible to give the baby to a normal family in the Free Cities. Xan names the child Luna and decides to raise her as her grandchild.

Xan loves raising Luna. She enjoys being around the energetic child. However, as Luna grows, her magic becomes stronger. Luna is unable to control it. Xan's granddaughter drinks the moonlight each night, and Luna's increasing magical strength causes Xan to lose her own magic and her health. She is concerned about this change. Xan tries to remember if this happened in the past, but she learns that most of her past memories are gone and she cannot remember anything.

Xan remembers the castle in the forest, so she goes there in search of answers. There, she finds a large collection of spell books. She takes them home and studies them, which is when Xan learns that Luna's magic will explode when she turns 13 and that the explosion of magic will lead to Xan's death. This is what happened to Zosimos, who gave Xan the gift of magic, and now this is what will happen to Xan, who gave Luna the gift of magic. Xan does not want to lose time with Luna. She is also concerned that Luna is too young and immature to handle all of the magic lying inside of her.

Xan decides to condense Luna's magic into a small mass and place it deep inside her brain where Luna will be unable to access it for quite a while. This provides Xan with more time to educate Luna and it gives her more years of healthy experiences with her family. However, Xan's spell changes Luna and she feels terribly guilty about altering her granddaughter. As Luna ages, Xan knows her magic is starting to pour out. She wants to tell Luna, but she does not know how to approach the subject.

Xan's health is very bad but she does not want to leave the abandoned child alone in the woods. She leaves the house and writes a note to Luna that explains part of what Luna needs to know. This causes Luna to become very upset, and she goes into the forest alone in search of her grandmother. Xan transforms into a swallow so that she can reach the baby faster and with ease. However, she is injured by a man in the woods. The man takes her into his pocket and forces Xan to travel with him for a while. Xan learns that the man is in the forest in order to kill the Witch. He notices Luna coming toward him, and he deems this person to be the Witch he must kill. Xan tries to stop the man but is too weak to transform back into her human form. Luna transforms Xan back into a human. She is very weak and cannot travel. They carry Xan to the Protectorate and she lives in the hospital ward inside the Tower. Xan dies shortly after arriving. Glerk visits his dear friend and asks her to come with him back to the bog. Xan agrees and she enters the bog with Glerk never to be seen again.

**Glerk**

Glerk is a swamp monster who is older than magic itself. He has four arms, each with seven fingers, and he often wraps his tail around himself. Glerk lives in the Bog. He loves reciting poetry and he loves spending time with his best friend, Xan. Glerk is the oldest creature on the planet. He was the first living thing on the planet and was created from the Bog.

Glerk does not approve of Xan's decision to enmagic a child and raise her in the forest. He knows the dangers of uncontrolled magic, and he is nervous for everyone's safety when Luna's magic explodes. He grows to love Luna and considers her to be a part of his family, despite his intolerance for hyperactive questioning and childish games. Glerk understands that all things must die and return to the Bog, but he is very upset at the idea that Xan will have to return to the Bog one day soon. He supports all of Xan's decisions and reminds her that they are friends and that he is there for her no matter what happens.

Glerk brings Fyrian with him on a journey through the forest to find Xan and Luna. Both of the women leave the house and Glerk understands that they will need his help. Xan is taken to the Protectorate after Luna weakens Sister Ignatia. Glerk goes to the Tower and remains with his friend despite the fact that his skin cracks from the lack of Bog water. Glerk visits Xan after she dies. He asks her to join him in the Bog, and Glerk takes Xan to the Bog with him. He leaves Luna a note that explains where he has gone and assures her that he will be back again at some point.

**Sister Ignatia**

Sister Ignatia grew up happily living in a small village in the forest. However, her village was destroyed, leaving her all alone in the world with no hope of ever feeling happiness again. She became so consumed with sorrow that it transformed into her food, and eating sorrow has helped Sister Ignatia stay alive forever. She uses this new magical ability to eat the sorrow of others, and she locks her own sorrow deep into her heart where she can forget her pain. She finds a young orphaned girl named Xan and brings her back to her home. Sister Ignatia lives in a castle with other witches and sorcerers who perform and study magic. The Sorrow Eater, as Xan refers to her, eats Xan's sadness each night. She plans on keeping the sorrowful Xan around forever, but Zosimos puts an end to the girl's torture as well as to Sister Ignatia's constant buffet of sorrow.

Sister Ignatia grows desperate for her own survival. The volcano erupts, and Sister Ignatia pretends to collect a group of humans into a new village called the Protectorate. She tells everyone that this is a safe haven where they will not be harmed. She works with the Council of Elders to control the townspeople. She does not want anyone in the Protectorate to feel happy or to have too much knowledge. She needs the people stuck in the Protectorate and sad. She accomplishes this by refusing many material objects of happiness from the town. She also spreads lies that there is an evil witch out to kill them. Each year, Sister Ignatia ensures the sorrow will continue when she orchestrates a Day of Sacrifice. Losing a child every year keeps the people in the Protectorate feeling deeply sad, which in turn keeps Sister Ignatia young and strong.

She develops a group of obedient soldiers named the Sisters of the Star. They live in the Tower where all of the books are, and the Sister educates her pupils about anything and everything she can. The Sisters are in charge of collecting any citizen of the Protectorate who goes mad with sorrow. Luna's mother goes crazy with the sorrow of losing her baby. The Sisters lock Luna's mother in the Tower, and Sister Ignatia feeds off of the deep sadness the madwoman feels. Each night, Sister Ignatia walks the hallway to consume the sadness of the prisoners. As the madwoman's magic grows stronger, she begins to realize what Sister Ignatia is and what she needs from the madwoman. This leads the madwoman away from her sorrow, and she begins to feel hopeful. The lack of sorrow makes Sister Ignatia weak and hungry.

Sister Ignatia volunteers to go into the forest and kill Antain on his mission to murder an evil witch that the Sister knows does not exist. She does not want anyone in the Protectorate to lose their sorrow because that means she will lose all of her powers. She enters the forest and quickly loses strength because she is not close to any sorrow. Sister Ignatia finds Antain in the forest, but she is unable to kill him because Luna works with the madwoman to uncover her own buried sorrow for the loss of her village so many years ago. Once her sadness is exposed, Sister Ignatia is no longer able to feed off of the sorrow in the Protectorate, and her elaborate plan to live in a sorrow factory forever is ruined. She is taken to the hospital ward in the Tower where she grows weaker each day.

**Antain**

Antain is part of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the Protectorate. His Uncle Gherland is the Grand Elder in the Council of Elders, and Antain's mother is desperate to keep Antain in power. Antain works in the Tower as an assistant to the Sisters of the Star for a while. Here, he gets to know Sister Ignatia very well, but the Sisters eventually release him just as they release all of the young boys who work for them. His mother then places Antain into the Council as an Elder-in-Training. Antain does not like this position but remains in the Council because he does not know any better.

Antain disapproves of the work in the Council. The rich men are selfish and eat luxurious foods no one else in the Protectorate get to eat. They disregard the happiness of the townspeople and they support the Day of Sacrifice each year. Antain's first Day of Sacrifice ends with Luna's mother, the madwoman, screaming from the rafters of her home. This image haunts Antain, and he makes excuses to miss every Day of Sacrifice thereafter.

Five years later, Antain is still an Elder-in-Training. He is unable to fully commit to the Council. He begins to ask his uncle questions, but Gherland warns Antain not to wonder about things he does not know. As a result, Antain seeks answers from the madwoman in the Tower. He tries to ask her questions, but she is very angry at him for taking her child away. She uses magic to make a flock of violent paper birds attack Antain, leaving his face covered in deep scars.

Antain is very depressed about his disfigurement. He quits the Council before they can harm him for being disobedient and becomes a successful carpenter. He marries his childhood crush, Ethyne, and the two of them have a baby boy named Luken. The madwoman feels connected to Antain somehow. She launches a paper bird with the scribblings of a forest map on it and sends it to him on the sidewalk below her cell.

Antain and Ethyne know that Luken will be sacrificed in the forest because he is the youngest baby in the Protectorate. Antain grows desperate to keep his family together. He visits the Council and vows to enter the forest and kill the evil Witch that demands sacrifices. The Council does not want him to go, but they are unable to change Antain's mind. He goes into the forest with the madwoman's map and the intention to kill the Witch. He comes across an injured bird and places it in his pocket so that he can take it to Ethyne for her to heal.

Antain sees Luna coming from a distance. He sees her magic flying all around the forest, and he prepares to murder the person coming at him. However, he quickly learns the truth about Xan, Luna, the elders, and the Day of Sacrifice. Antain rushes back to the Protectorate to save as many people as he can. He remains in the Protectorate and he lives with Ethyne, Luken, Luna, and the madwoman. The Protectorate is no longer a place filled with sorrow and Antain lives his life happily.

**The Madwoman**

The madwoman is a happy mother living in a happy marriage. She learns that the Council demands her baby for the Day of Sacrifice and she refuses to give her child up. She grabs her young daughter and climbs to the top rafters of her home, screaming that she will not lose her child. Grand Elder Gherland sends the Sisters of the Star to remove the woman from her home and take the baby from her arms. This causes the woman to go mad with sorrow. She is taken to the Tower where she is locked up in a jail cell and studied.

Living all alone in the jail cell causes the woman to go crazy. She finds magic hiding in the cracks of her cell and learns how to perform small magic tricks. She grows obsessed with paper. Every day, she scribbles countless numbers of maps with the phrase, "She is here" on them. She knows her daughter is alive, but she does not know how to get to her. The madwoman folds a myriad of paper birds. She throws them out of her tiny cell window, hoping that someone will understand the map and go searching for her child.

Each night, Sister Ignatia wanders the hallway and feeds off of the madwoman's sorrow. As her magic grows stronger, the madwoman learns how to block Sister Ignatia. Antain visits her to ask her questions about her child. This makes her so angry that she sends her paper birds to attack Antain. When the madwoman learns what she does to Antain, she is filled with regret for him and feels somehow responsible for him. She feels as though her magic helps her know everything and see everyone, although she cannot explain how or why. She learns to transform into different animals, and she disguises herself as a beetle one day. She sneaks into Sister Ignatia's office where she is meeting with the Grand Elder Gherland. She overhears the two plotting to kill Antain and the madwoman becomes very upset.

The madwoman watches Antain leave on his doomed mission in the forest; she then turns the bars on her cell window into limp paper. She escapes from her cell and all of her paper birds carry her to Luna's home. However, no one is there when she arrives at the house. The madwoman learns that her daughter is alive and is named Luna. She goes in search of the daughter she has been hoping to find for nearly 13 years.

The madwoman acquires Sister Ignatia's Seven League boots. She does not know what they do, but she knows she needs shoes because she has not had any since she was locked away in the Tower. She travels in Luna's direction and finally finds her while Antain is attacking her. Her paper birds separate the two and end the fight. The madwoman tells Luna that she is her biological mother. She helps Luna defeat Sister Ignatia because the madwoman knows a lot about how the Sister operates.

Luna takes the madwoman back to the Protectorate where the live with Antain and Ethyne. Luna searches for her mother's real name because she has forgotten it in all her years alone in the tower. She discovers that her mother's name is really Adara. The two of them become close. Adara escorts her daughter to collect Xan's body in the Tower, but Xan has already left with Glerk.

**Fyrian**

Fyrian is a very tiny dragonling who loves to sing. He is about the size of a small bird, and he often travels in Luna's pockets. Fyrian believes he is a Simply Enormous dragon. He think he lives in a world filled with giants, which is why he seems small in comparison. This is a lie that Xan tells him. She does not want Fyrian to feel embarrassed about being such a small dragon. He lost his mother when he was very young. Fyrian's mother was a ginormous dragon who was also very beautiful. She died because she sacrificed herself into the volcano along with Zosimos. Fyrian wants to think he is as big and grand of a dragon as his mother once was. Glerk does not agree with telling him these lies, but he goes along with these stories because Xan wants thinks it is best.

Fyrian is thrilled when Xan brings Luna home with her. He is excited to have a baby to play with, and Luna quickly becomes his best friend. Luna leaves the workshop in search of Xan. This makes Glerk anxious, so the two of them journey into the forest to find both women. Fyrian begins to grow while he travels through the forest. No one knows why he begins to grow at that moment. His body changes shape and size and different times and in different places, which makes Fyrian feel both confused and embarrassed. However, he quickly learns to fly with his giant body and he rushes to Luna and Xan in an effort to save them. Fyrian carries Glerk and Sister Ignatia to safety and rescues them from the volcanic explosion. The people of the Protectorate try their best to accept the sweet dragon, but he still spends much time in the forest now that he cannot fit in Luna's pocket.

**Grand Elder Gherland**

The Grand elder Gherland is the leader of the Council of Elders. This group is in charge of the Protectorate, and they own everything in the region. The Elders own the Bog, the houses, and the road that goes through the forest. They control all of the townspeople, and Gherland controls the council. He works closely with Sister Ignatia, and the two of them plot to ensure everyone in the Protectorate remains too ignorant and too depressed to ever fight their authority.

Gherland is old, and he enjoys his comfortable life. He eats luxurious foods no one else has access to and he enjoys home luxuries such as a mirror. He loves his life and he is willing to do anything to protect it. He coordinates the Day of Sacrifice each year. He tells the town that the baby is sacrificed to an evil Witch in the forest, but Gherland thinks this is a lie. He believes the baby is sacrificed to die in the woods in order to keep the Council's comfortable lifestyle, and this thought does not bother him much.

Gherland allows his sister to convince him into letting his nephew, Antain, join the Council. He tries his best to train Antain, but his nephew is not right for the job. The Council informs Gherland that they will get rid of his nephew, which makes him very upset. Gherland meets with Sister Ignatia and they agree that Antain must die in order to maintain a controllable population in the Protectorate. Antain does not die on his mission. Ethyne reveals the truth about the Elders and Gherland is thrown into prison in the Tower. The only thing that the new and hopeful Council requires of him in exchange of his freedom is an apology. Gherland refuses to apologize, so he spends the rest of his life in prison where he dies alone in a cell.

**Ethyne**

Ethyne is a child in the Protectorate. She becomes an orphan when she is in high school. She does not know what to do with her life so she joins the Sisters of the Star. She spends a few years there but then decides to quit. This decision infuriates Sister Ignatia because Ethyne is the first person to ever quit the Sisters of the Star. She reconnects with Antain, who she was attracted to since she was a young child, and the two them marry and have a baby named Luken. Ethyne knows her son will be sacrificed on the Day of Sacrifice because he is the youngest in the Protectorate. This causes Ethyne to become upset, but, unlike her husband, she uses her knowledge to fight the evil forces in the Protectorate.

Ethyne kept a secret from Antain. She quit the Sisters of the Star because she learned that Sister Ignatia is a Witch and that the Day of Sacrifice is a lie. She approaches the Sisters in the Tower and tells them the truth. She invites the believers among them to join her in telling the truth the townspeople. Ethyne begins a protest. She educates the people in the Protectorate and they become enraged when they learn the truth behind their miserable city. She unlocks the Tower and invites everyone in to learn and read and educate themselves. She also releases the prisoners in the Tower who have been locked up for no reason. These changes bring immediate hope to the Protectorate. Their sorrow lifts and they are able to truly see the oppressive forces that have been harming them for so long.

Antain safely returns to her, and Ethyne is able to keep her family is tact. She lives in a house with Antain, her baby Luken, Luna, and Adar (formerly known as the madwoman).

**Zosimos**

Zosimos used to live with other witches and sorcerers in a castle in the forest, but he is dead before this story even starts. The group wanted to experiment with magic and learn more about their powers. Zosimos did not agree with one of the Sorrow Eater's experiments, which was to feed off of the sorrow of an unwilling orphan named Xan.

Zosimos wanted to protect Xan, so he claimed her as his student of magic and he trained her. But his decision came with a huge consequence. As Xan's magic grew stronger, his grew weaker. His magic left him and traveled to Xan instead. Zosimos saw the potential danger of both the Sorrow Eater and the smoking volcano, so he erased Xan's memories and taught her how to forget her sorrows.

When the volcano started erupting, Zosimos hid the castle with magic, placing it underground. He wrote notes on some of the rocks to help future witches enter the castle later. Then, Zosimos got onto his old friend, the Simply Enormous Dragon, and the two of them flew into the volcano. Zosimos sacrificed himself in order to save all pf the villagers in the area. He asked Xan to tell everyone about his brave actions, but she never has because she lost her memories of that day.

**Sisters of the Star**

The Sisters of the Star are a group of women who study and train in the Tower. This group is controlled by Sister Ignatia, and they spend their days learning about everything possible. The Tower has training rooms for martial arts and classrooms for every subject of learning imaginable. The Sisters are considered to be the most powerful and knowledgeable group in the area, and they are in charge of controlling any person in the Protectorate who causes drama or concern.

Ethyne visits them while Sister Ignatia is out of the Protectorate. She tells all of her Sisters about the lies the Council and Sister Ignatia have been telling everyone. The believers follow Ethyne out of the Tower and help her spread the truth around the city.

**Symbols and Symbolism**

**The Bog**

The Bog is a symbol for the creation of life. One of the folktales in the Protectorate is about the Bog creating all life on the planet. They believe that, "All good things come from the Bog" (82) because it is responsible for creating all life. "It is from the Bog that the world was made" (83), the people say. And they believe that the Bog made life and that it still provides a good life today.

The Bog is not a desolate place in the novel. Here, the people of the Protectorate farm and make money from the Zirin that grows in the area. They are thankful for the Zirin the Bog produces because it gives them a good life. People believe that the Bog used to be the only thing in the world, noting that "In the beginning, there was only Bog, and Bog, and Bog. There were no people. There were no fish. There were no birds or beasts or mountains or forest or sky. The Bog was everything and everything was the Bog" (83). This comes to symbolize life itself; that life is born from the Bog and that they return to the Bog when they die.

**Hope**

This novel explores a central of theme of hope versus sorrow, with hope prevailing. Barnhill uses the idea of hope as an antidote for sorrow and a symbol for enlightenment. Sister Ignatia uses sorrow as a weapon. Sorrow is what harms the people and sadness is what makes them too weak to fight back. However, hope is the only thing that can destroy sorrow.

The madwoman is the first person to use her hope in the battle against sadness and control. In the same moment, the madwoman feels her sorrow. She describes it as having merciless density, "Like a black hole in her heart, swallowing the light" (131). Moments later, she throws a map down to Antain, who picks it up and seems to understand what it means. In the same moment, the madwoman's sorrow transforms into hope. "The miracle of transformation," she thinks. "Each precious thing is destroyed and each precious thing is saved. Hope, hope, hope. Her sorrow was gone" (131). And that very same moment when the madwoman allows her sorrow to fly away, the strong presence of hope causes Sister Ignatia to cry out in pain. Hope destroys sorrow. Hope heals sadness.

Sorrow is afraid of hope because it knows it is no match against hope. Antain accidentally brings hope to the Protectorate when people learn about his mission to kill the Witch. This makes people feel hopeful that Antain will put an end to the Day of Sacrifice and will bring happiness to the Protectorate. Sister Ignatia and Gherland feel very nervous about the idea of Antain bringing hope to the Protectorate. Gherland reports that the Protectorate feels hopeful, using the word hope, "As though it were the bitterest of pills" (217). This quickly leads to the Sorrow Eater feeling nervous. She comments that, "If he should return finding nothing . . . soon these reports of nothing become something. And soon the Protectorate starts getting ideas" (218). As a Sorrow Eater, Sister Igntia is fearful of hope in her city. The more hope people have, the harder it is for her to survive because hope destroys sorrow.

Most importantly, the hope Ethyne establishes in the Protectorate helps destroy Sister Ignatia. Ethyne provides the people with hope because she makes them understand the power they truly have. She helps them learn how great life can be if they just fight back against lies and manipulation. This establishes such strong hope that misery and sorrow are destroyed faster than a person can bake a loaf of bread.

**The Council of Elders**

The Council of Elders symbolizes oppressive forces because the Elders purposefully control people's lives, which they themselves have chosen a path for. The Elders know that their only hope for maintaining their power is by holding people in the Protectorate down. The townspeople outnumber the Elders, which means they have the potential for more power; but the Council makes sure the townspeople never feel strong enough to fight back. The Council enjoys wealth. They enjoy luxury items and they eat better than anyone else in the Protectorate. The Council knows that they lie to the people and they do it with the intention of keeping people sad and weak. This is how oppression operates, and the only antidote to oppressive force is empowering the masses.

The Council is powerful because they own most of the Protectorate. The fact that they own all of the property and will not consider selling it means that the people who work in their Zirin Bog, travel on their road, or live in their houses are enslaved to the Elders. They depend on them for their survival and happiness, regardless of how small of an amount the feel. The Elders continue to keep their power by making people afraid of what is out there, which establishes the Council as a protective force despite the fact that they intend to harm the population. They create fear in the people of the Protectorate by manifesting a fake story about a terrible Witch in the forest, and the Elders believe that the people's fear of the far-off Witch "Made for a frightened people, a subdued people, a compliant people, who lived their lives in a saddened haze, the clouds of their grief numbing their senses and dampening their minds" (12). If people are too concerned about invisible outside dangers, they will be too preoccupied to look close to home and ask for changes.

The Elders lose all of their power in less than a day, and the people take them over almost as soon as Ethyne spreads the truth. This shows how quickly an oppressive force can be conquered through knowledge. Ethyne knows that the people of the Protectorate are prevented from learning too much because knowledge and awareness will incite masses to fight oppression and help the masses gain the freedom that is being withheld from them.

**The Fog**

In this novel, the fog is used as a symbol for blocking the truth. The people of the Protectorate have the ability to learn the truth any time they want, but they live in a foggy haze that causes them to survive instead of thrive. Each time Xan sees the Protectorate, she notes that the city is covered in a sad fog. This fog never leaves the city and it causes people in the Protectorate to stop looking up and try to survive in the damp darkness of their days. Ethyne knows, “The fog made people sleepy” (313) and she wants to wake them up. She lifts the fog when she shows people the truth. Their belief, their knowledge of the truth, immediately causes the fog to lift and the sky to clear. The Protectorate cannot believe what they are seeing, but Ethyne knows that they are not seeing dreams. She knows, "They were visions” (313) of truth related to the terrible city the Elders and Sister Ignatia have been making for generations. Ethyne notes that, "The cloud of sorrow has, for years, blocked my own knowledge. But now the clouds have burned away and the sun is shining. And I can see clearly" (311-12). The more the Protectorate understands what has been happening in their city, the more the fog disappears and leaves the city bright and sunny yet again.

**Birds**

Images of birds are used frequently in Barnhill's novel, and they grow to symbolize a person's freedom. The madwoman is the most closely connected with birds because she crafts so many paper birds each day. It is these paper birds that help free her from Antain's questions. Though the madwoman did not intend to harm Antain as badly as she did, the birds acted as a shield against unwanted questions that the madwoman was not yet ready to answer. Later, the madwoman uses the paper birds to escape from her cell because they gather underneath her and help her float from her tall cell window over to Luna's home in the forest. The birds literally carry the madwoman away from her problems and propel her toward a freeing reunion with her long-lost daughter. Even Luna refers to her mother with a bird reference as she remembers her childhood. Luna remembers using the word mama, and states that she can hear the word, "Echoing from one side of her skull to the other, Mama, mama, mama, over and over and over again, like the cry of a faraway bird” (138). The two woman are deeply connected despite the fact that they do not know of one another's existence.

The narrator refers to the madwoman as being as observant as a crow because, as she gains magical powers, she uses her new knowledge to learn everything she can about the world going on below her jail cell. The narrator notes that the madwoman is learning all about “impossible things" (143) and that she is more aware than the average person. The madwoman is then described in a comparison stating that "A man might drop a coin on the ground and never find it again, but a crow will find it in a flash. Knowledge, in its essence, was a glittering jewel—and the madwoman was a crow” (143). She has no problem finding the so-called glittering jewel of her daughter living in the woods, nor does the madwoman miss the jewel of knowledge wandering right in front of her cell each night in the form of a Sorrow Eater. Others miss this information but the madwoman is patient enough to find it, study it, and harness the power of the new understandings she gains through observation. Much like a bird, the madwoman lives her life with a birds eye view of the Protectorate. She witnesses the townspeople trudging through their oppressed lives as they wander below her. Birds fly over cities and the madwoman resides over one as she watches high up in the tower.

**Sister Ignatia's Pearl Heart**

Sister Ignatia's cold, hard pearl of a heart symbolizes the cold and heartless nature of people who stay closed off from others. The book notes that Sister Ignatia chose to wall off her sorrow, which leads her to cover it up and press it in "Tighter and tighter. And it was so hard, and heavy, and dense that it bent the light around it. It sucked everything inside" (366). She suffers through a major trauma and it makes her a very sad person. However, instead of talking to a friend or working through the difficult emotions, Sister Ignatia chose to ignore her problems. She locked her sorrow away and tried her best to forget about it. This causes a negative vacuum where her heart sucks everything into it, much like a black hole (366).

In contrast, Xan has friends and she talks about her problems with them. This helps Xan remain a good Witch that survives off of Mother Nature. Xan is a happy person who wants to help people because she is also a balanced person who does not close people off. Sister Ignatia, on the other hand, walls off her heart. By ignoring her sorrow, she allows it to consume her and it turns her into a hateful and harmful person. This can be connected to the popular saying, "Misery loves company," which means that a sad person feels better when they are around sadness. It makes them feel more relaxed and comfortable because other people feel just as sad as they do. The moment Luna exposes the Sister's hardened heart, she is unable to handle her own sadness because she has never learned how to talk through her problems. This crushes her spirit and leaves her in a hospital bed clinging to life.

**Paper**

Much like its flimsy physical traits, paper is used as a symbol for weak and fleeting things. The madwoman and Xan both refer to their lives as being much like paper because it is delicate and fragile, much like their lives feel. The madwoman does not know if she is crazy or not. She does not feel mad but everyone tells her that she is, and her time spent in the Tower takes away any connection to reality she might be able to have if she were set free. The madwoman describes herself as being hungry for paper. "At night she dreamed of the dry smoothness of the sheaf, the painful bite of the edge. She dreamed of the slip of ink into the deepening white. She dreamed of paper birds and paper stars and paper skies. She dreamed of a paper moon hovering over paper cities and paper forests and paper people. A world of paper. A universe of paper. She dreamed of oceans of ink and forests of quills and an endless bog of words. She dreamed of it all in abundance” (128). Paper becomes the only small piece of hope the madwoman has while crunched into her small jail cell in the Tower. The madwoman becomes obsessed with paper by fashioning hundreds of paper birds each day. She uses some of the paper birds as a small piece of fragile hope that a person will pick up the fallen bird from the street and study the map in order to locate her daughter. Her hope for this outcome is small but it is there and she never gives up on the small, fleeting chance that a person will believe in her map and follow it into the forest.

Xan also compares her life to paper in the way that she knows her health is failing and she feels as though her very existence is as weak and flimsy as paper. She walks through the forest and notes that her life, "Is made of paper. Paper birds. Paper maps. Paper books. Paper journals. Paper words and paper thoughts. Everything fades and shreds and crinkles away to nothing" (225). Xan understands how delicate life is because she has lived for 500 years. Her new connection to her own mortality in the face of Luna's growing strength allows Xan to reflect on her life and note the fleeting nature of it; that life is temporary much like notes on paper can be erased or crinkled or forgotten.

**Luna's Magic**

Luna's magic is a symbol for the bit of a person's unique and special nature that can never be taken away. Luna is a magical girl. In fact, she has so much magic that she actually becomes magic as it pours out of every part of her. This is a unique and special trait of Luna's, and it is a trait that Xan tries to hide away. Xan does not do this out of spite, but that does not change the fact that the loss of Luna's magic takes away a large part of herself. She loses herself. However, the part of herself that makes her unique and special never actually goes away. Rather, it hides deep down inside and waits until Luna is ready for it to come out again. It is often the case that a person allows another to change their unique personality traits. Traumatic events or bullying can lead to people hiding a part of themselves in order to protect themselves. Luna's magic was hidden from her as a form of protection, but her magic does not go away forever. The magic of Luna's personality simply goes dormant; it hides for a while and comes out when she is ready. This allows Luna to become herself yet again, and she gains confidence due to the fact that she is whole once more.

**Sister Ignatia**

Sister Ignatia is a direct symbol for a person who feeds off of another person's sorrow. This is a common social problem among friends, where one person needs the other to feel sad in order to help them feel normal. Sister Ignatia is a sad person. She has many depressing memories related to the loss of her family, and, rather than working through her depression, the Sister hungers for the sadness of others. Being surrounded by sorrow allows the Sister to stay normal and to fit in. She needs others to feel as bad as she does or else she will wither away.

**Tigers**

Sister Ignatia is described as being very much like a tiger, and the tiger descriptions in this story come to symbolize ruthlessness. Tigers are predators. They hunt for food and they are considered to the strongest animals in their ecosystems. They are fierce and strong and relentless about their territory. In their natural environment, tigers will do anything to survive and they acquire survival skills which will help them remain in power.

Many of the animals living near tigers feel threatened when they are near, and the animals try their best to escape the dangers the predator brings to their lives. Much like a tiger in its natural environment, Sister Ignatia is a ruthless hunter. Tigers hunt for food while the Sister hunts for sorrow. She stalks her prey in the same way tigers stalk theirs, and Sister Ignatia is always searching for more sustenance because she never feels full.

**Settings**

**The Protectorate**

The Protectorate is a city created by Sister Ignatia to help her survive for a long time. She told everyone to come live in the Protectorate after their villages were destroyed by the volcanic eruption 500 years ago. People came, but they felt massive sorrow for the loss of their homes. Sister Ignatia thrives off of eating the sorrow from others, and the mass of sorrow hangs over the Protectorate like a fog. Now people call the area by different names, sometimes referring to it as "Cattail Kingdom” or as the “City of Sorrows” (4). The city is a clear area with a dangerous forest on one side and a Zirin-producing Bog on the other. The Bog stretches for as far as anyone knows, but the forest leads to other cities no one dares to visit.

The Protectorate is run by Sister Ignatia, who recruits young women into the Sisters of the Star that are responsible for the safety of the city. The people are controlled by a group of rich men called the Council of Elders, run by a man called the Grand Elder Gherland. The Council enjoy luxurious lives with better food and less work than anyone else in the area. They make decisions for the townspeople and they tell whatever lies they need to in order to keep their power. The Council owns everything in the Protectorate. They own the Bog, the road, the shops, and everything else people need to use in their daily lives.

The Protectorate is a sad and dark place, where no one feels free or happy. The people live in fear of a Witch that they believe lives in the forest and eats babies. The Council tells them that they must sacrifice a baby to the Witch each year in order to keep the Witch away from their town.

**The Castle**

More than 500 years before this story starts, there was a group of wizards and sorcerers who lived in a castle in the woods. They used this space to perform magic and to test new spells. However, an evil Witch got so angry that she harnessed the fire of many dragons and forced them to breathe heat into the earth. This created a volcano, which erupted. Zosimos protected the contents of the castle by hiding it underground, using magic to sink the building and leaving only enmagiced stones behind.

Now the castle is an area of ruins in the middle of the forest. Xan travels to the ruins in search of answers related to Luna and her the magic coming out of her. Xan funds the enmagiced stones and uses them to enter the castle. It is here where Xan finds important information. She learns that Luna's magic will explode within her on her thirteenth birthday and she learns how to harness Luna's magic and hide it from her. Later in the book, Luna visits this castle on her own. Here, the written spells fly towards her and re-teach her all about magic and what she is capable of doing.

**The Free Cities**

The Free Cities lie on the other side of the forest from the Protectorate. No one from the Protectorate has ever visited them, but Xan travels there every year. The Free Cities know that Xan is a Witch. This is a good thing for them because Xan visits and helps them with health problems. Xan also provides the Free Cities with a baby to adopt each year, which turns into a holiday they call Star Children Day. The town celebrates Xan's arrival and she is treated like a guest of honor. Antain trades with people who live in the Free Cities because they want him to build special cradles for babies called Star Children.

**The Bog**

In the beginning, the world in this book had only a Bog and nothing else. Then, according to legend, the Bog wanted to create a world so it would be less lonely. Glerk was born from the Bog. Then from the Bog came animals and plants and humans. Those people built cities, and Glerk lived in the world he wanted to create. Glerk believes everyone is the Bog just like the Bog is in everyone. He takes Xan with him into the Bog after she dies and tells Luna that he will return one day.

The people in the Protectorate depend on the Bog to make a living. It produces something called Zirin, which can be farmed and sold. However, although the people in the Protectorate work in the Bog, they do not own the area. This area is owned and managed by the Council.

**The Tower**

The Tower is the tallest building in the Protectorate and in the surrounding area. It is described as being built like a fortress, with a star observatory on the rooftop. The Tower is purposefully made to confuse any visitor. It has numerous twisting stairwells that make it impossible to travel anywhere in a straight line. A group called the Sisters of the Star live and work inside. They have all the knowledge and skills of the area because the Tower also has all of the books in the area. No one else is allowed to read them other than the Sisters of the Star. The Tower also contains a prison, which is where people are taken when they go crazy on the Day of Sacrifice. Luna's mother is taken to the Tower when her baby is stolen from her. She lives in a jail cell for many years while the head Sister, Sister Ignatia, feeds off of her sorrow for the loss of her baby.

**The Forest**

The forest used to be a safe and happy place filled with many different and prosperous villages hosting various trades. A Witch created a volcano there 500 years ago, and the eruption destroyed all of the villages in the area. The survivors were taken to the Protectorate where they were promised a safer life. Now the forest is a dangerous place. There is toxic air and deep mud pits. There are craters and hot spots in the ground that will burn the feet of any traveler.

Xan lives in the middle of the forest. She has a workshop, a small home, a small garden, and an area for her goats. She feels the forest is mostly safe as long as she stays on paths she knows well. There is a road that leads through the center of the forest and connects the Protectorate to the Free Cities. However, no one travels on this road because it is owned by members of the Council and they demand high prices in tolls to travel on the road.

The Protectorate sacrifices a baby each year. The Council of Elders takes the baby to a spot in the forest surrounded by five Sycamore trees known as the Witch's Handmaidens. The Elders to do not like spending time in the forest. They leave the baby quickly, which is when Xan scoops up the child and treks across the large forest to the Free Cities. She makes this trip each year. The Free Cities are so thankful for these babies that they created a holiday called Star Children Day.

**Themes and Motifs**

**Hope versus Sorrow**

Every person's life will be affected by sad events, but Barnhill's novel focuses on the importance of a person's resilience to their sad encounters and how they use their experiences to help or harm. The Protectorate is seen as the least resilient force in this novel. While it is made up of lots of people, the Protectorate operates as one character in many ways. The townspeople live together in the Bog, and they survive in the dark fog together. Likewise, the townspeople wake up and live in the fog together, in one simultaneous event. The Protectorate is established by Sister Ignatia, who claims that the city is for anyone who needs a safe place to live after the volcano eruption. This is a sad start to a city, and the Protectorate itself is not resilient at all. It is described as being "A dismal place—bad air, bad water, sorrow settling over the roofs of its houses like a cloud” (19-20). The town itself bends and breaks under the sorrow of its own creation. It lacks any resilience and it never fights for happiness, so it is easy to control and to manipulate and to harm.

Antain, Ethyne, and the madwoman are all residents of the Protectorate but they react very differently to the sorrow of their region. Antain and Ethyne both question the reasons for the sorrow in the Protectorate. Antain has a moment when he doubts the reasons behind the Day of Sacrifice, but he never takes his curiosity further. His curiosity is what takes him to the Tower to ask the madwoman questions, and his actions lead him to a deeply scarred face. This brings a huge change in Antain's character. Where he was once a hopeful and curious young man, a positive presence in the oppressive Council, he is now a depressed man who is too self-conscious to walk down the street without covering his face. After the attack, Antain feels as though, "The world was heavy, that the air, thick with sorrow, draped over his mind and body and vision, like a fog” (116-17). This proves that Antain crumbles under the weight of his own sorrow and has a hard time fighting against the force. Ethyne, on the other hand, maintains a positive attitude in spite of the fact that she learns the truth about the Protectorate. She remains hopeful because she knows, if timed right, she will be able to change the Protectorate for the better and save it from an evil Witch that has been controlling it. Unlike Antain, Ethyne never allows her curiosity to melt away. She remains strong and fights against the thick sorrow in the Protectorate. The final character in the Protectorate is the madwoman, who is forced to live a sad life locked away in the Tower. She battles with whether she will fight against her sorrow or fall victim to it. She wants so badly to be resilient against her own sorrow, but she finds it difficult to have the strength to overcome her depressing feelings. At one point, the madwoman “Pressed her hand to her chest and felt her sorrow—the merciless density of it, like a black hole in her heart, swallowing the light” (131). But it is soon after this that she finds her strength yet again. She finds hope with Antain's understanding of her forest map. This small sliver of hope is what provides her with enough resilience to fight the sorrow she feels and the madwoman is then empowered to change her own life and to fight the Sorrow Eater.

Xan does not find the ability to help the Protectorate until she remembers the past she has locked away in her memory. She found the strength to live for 500 years because she chose to forget the memories that made her feel sad. This is not a form of resilience because Xan never confronts her sorrow. Instead, she locks it away. As soon as she unlocks her memories through trips to the castle, Xan then finds the strength to fight against her sorrowful past and to confront Luna about her magic. The only problem is that Xan finds all of this strength too late and Luna's magic spreads uncontrollably across the entire forest. Sister Ignatia locks away her sorrow in the same way Xan does. Both characters choose to avoid their memories, and the Sister's choice to lock her sorrow away leads her to losing any life. This is why the Sister immediately falls to her deathbed upon the revelation that she lived through a traumatic event. She never learned resistance; the Sister only ever learned how to avoid her sadness.

**Misunderstandings**

This novel contains many stories that contradict one another, all of which are crafted from false assumptions and quick judgments that lead to generations of misery and terror. These misunderstandings reach far deeper than the story of the volcanic eruption. The tales that cause misunderstandings are also related to the three regions that rarely cross over into one another. To begin, everyone knows there was a volcanic eruption nearly 500 years ago. Everyone also knows that a man and a dragon flew inside the volcano, died, and stopped the destruction of the eruption. However, that is all people agree upon. The Protectorate believes that the Simply Enormous Dragon went to the volcano in order to battle against Zosimos, the kind sorcerer (58). On the other hand, Xan is able to remember that Zosimos took his dragon friend with him as a selfless sacrifice to save the people in the surrounding villages. Xan is unable to remember this even right away, so she never follows Zosimos' wish to be remembered for his sacrifice and bravery. The Protectorate knows, as everyone else does, that an evil Witch started the eruption out of rage. What the Protectorate does not know is that the evil Witch is living with them in their city while a kind and potentially helpful Witch is living in the forest. This misunderstanding leads the Protectorate to fear the unknown. They falsely assume that there is danger out in the forest, which then leads them to depend on Sister Ignatia's unnecessary protection. What is significant about the fact that the Protectorate fears the forest and its residents is that Xan actually fears the Protectorate. She has interacted with the Elders who own the road, and, although she does not know their social status, she views the owners of the road as rough and intimidating. In fact, Xan avoids the road because of the, “Gang of thugs and bullies from the Protectorate” (19) who charge high prices for traveling on a road they call their own. Each group of people is afraid of the other because they assume the worst, yet the Protectorate could have greatly benefitted from working with Xan all those years. One might argue that, if Xan's memory was better and she had communicated with the Protectorate, Sister Ignatia would never have gotten as powerful as she did. Additionally, the people of the Protectorate would have been far less likely to live in misery all those years.

Each of the three regions in the book--the Protectorate, the Free Cities, and the forest--all misunderstands the others' intents. The Protectorate never visits the Free Cities and only rare traders from the Free Cities come to their Bog. Despite the lack of interaction, the Protectorate thinks that, "The people on the other end of the Road were strange. Everyone knew it, though no one had met any” (117). Here again is an example of false assumptions that lead to pain and sorrow. A partnership with the Free Cities, an open line of communication and understanding between the two places, may very well have rescued the Protectorate from so many generations of oppression and control and sadness and sacrifices. But the Protectorate chooses to hide from the world. They are told that danger lurks in the forest and they choose to believe that information before trying to learn about it themselves. Xan is guilty of this false assumption as well. She views the Protectorate as a dismal place and comments that it has, "Bad air, bad water, sorrow settling over the roofs of its houses like a cloud” (19-20). Xan never enters the Protectorate. She never tries to work with the people of the Protectorate and instead focuses all of her help and healing powers on the people of the Free Cities because they are more welcoming to her. Towards the end of her life, Xan realizes how helpful she could have been if she had only given the Protectorate a chance and bravely entered with the intention to ease the sorrow cast over the city.

The false assumptions continue with regards to the Day of Sacrifice. True, the people of the Protectorate assume that this sacrifice is necessary, but this does not change the fact that it brings about deep depression for everyone in the area. This is not a holiday; this is a day of sorrow and mourning. However, the Free Cities see this event in an entirely different light. They call this holiday the Star Children Day and they relish in the delight of welcoming another child into their communities. The Free Cities never ask where Xan gets the children because they assume she takes them from families unwilling or unable to raise the children themselves. This misunderstanding leads to huge amounts of Star Children being delivered to happy families while forgetting about the tragic families back in the Protectorate.

The final example of prejudices that lead to hurtful false assumptions is when Antain approaches Xan in the forest for the first time. He believes he is going to the forest to reason with the Witch because Antain is doubtful that the Witch is really as evil as everyone says she is. However, the moment he sees Xan, Antain is overcome by his fear and pre-existing judgments. He attacks Xan, which frightens her and results in Antain being pushed to the ground. Much of the conflicts that take place after this event in Chapter 18, "In Which a Witch is Discovered" could have been avoided if Antain had remained calm and objective and talked to the Witch as he planned on doing. When Antain first comes across Xan, they both think the other is in the forest to harm the baby, which is why Xan attacks him with magic and flies away with the child.

**Knowledge is Power**

The novel illustrates that knowledge is the most powerful weapon for a person to have, and denying a person knowledge ensures that person will be forever enslaved. Sister Ignatia is the character who understands this concept the best. She knows that knowledge is the greatest power there is. This is why Sister Ignatia lives in the Tower where all of the books are locked away for her private use. She refuses to allow the Protectorate to educate themselves because she does not want anyone to acquire or form ideas. She even notes that, “Knowledge, after all, is a precious commodity" (93) because it is the one thing she can trade with the Elders and the one thing that ensures her powerful position in the city. Sister Ignatia also spreads false knowledge about the evil Witch in the forest, knowing that she needs the Protectorate to believe in everything that will help her remain in power. “‘I started the stories in the Protectorate,’ she screams. ‘I did. They all came from me. There is no story that I did not tell first’" (329). These rumors help keep the Protectorate under her control. The Grand Elder Gherland is also incredibly manageable because Sister Ignatia treats him like an equal despite the fact that she is using him. She keeps his life comfortable because he helps her spread fear and sorrow throughout the Protectorate. Sister Ignatia needs him to do her dirty work. It is Gherland who collects the babies on the Day of Sacrifice. It is Gherland who carries the child to the forest with the intent that it will die all alone. However, Sister Ignatia is able to control him because she convinces him that he knows everything, which he does not. But Gherland is thirsty for power and that makes him thirsty for knowledge. The more Gherland knows about the phony sacrifices and the fictional evil Witch in the forest, the more loyal he is to Sister Ignatia. This knowledge also makes Gherland feel as though he is the most powerful man in the Protectorate. Both he and the Elders protect their knowledge. They do not share most, if any, of their secret knowledge with Antain despite the fact that he trains with them for five years. The Council knows the power that knowledge provides and they do not want to share it with anyone they do not have to.

Ethyne understands the power of knowledge better than any other non-magical person in the Protectorate. She is very well aware that teaching the Protectorate about the lies they have been fed will free the entire city from the burden they live under. She takes the exact opposite approach to knowledge that Sister Ignatia takes. While Sister Ignatia keeps knowledge selfishly to herself, Ethyne shares it equally with everyone. She opens up the Tower as a public library for community learning and she wants everyone to have control over him or herself. Ultimately, this makes Ethyne more powerful than any other character. She alone is responsible for the liberation of the Protectorate, and yet she has no ego related to this accomplishment.

Both Xan and Luna find their own powers after they seek the knowledge they are missing. Xan does not remember most of her past, so she is unable to fully understand the world she lives in. Luna, on the other hand, is missing a significant piece of her identity because her magic is locked away. Both women work alone to gain the knowledge they need in order to be whole again, and both women become unstoppable forces once they learn what they need to.

**Memory**

A person's memories are one of the most valuable commodities in the novel, rendering characters weak if they are unable to remember things and powerful if they are able to hold on to the knowledge of their past. Many of the main characters in this novel struggle with the loss of their memories and lament their resulting loss of agency. To begin, Xan is unable to fully help people because she has lost almost all of her past memories. She has lived for almost 500 years, which she believes contributes to her loss of memories, and she tells Glerk, “I think we both became accustomed to not remembering things. We just let things get . . . foggy” (68). However, this is not the case with Xan. She forgets her past because she chose to lock out her memories many years ago. Xan has almost no memories from before the volcano erupted many years ago. This was a traumatizing event and Xan chose to lock her memories and sorrow away instead of dealing with her emotions. This leads Xan to forget about Zosimos' brave act to stop the volcanic eruption, and it also causes her to inadvertently dishonor his memory by not telling people about his bravery that day. Additionally, Xan's inability to remember the past leads her to forget all about helping anyone in the Protectorate, and Xan feels terribly guilty about never helping the people living in the fog of sorrow. As Xan gains her memories, she also acquires knowledge, and, as she acquires knowledge, Xan gains power. Sister Ignatia knows that "Knowledge, after all, is a precious commodity" (93) because she is aware that remembering things from the past is what provides her with so much power today. The Sister clearly remembers the day of the eruption and she knows exactly why she created the Protectorate. She uses this knowledge to spread scary rumors about a Witch and to control the entire population of a city.

Xan treats memory as though it "was a slippery thing" (56), but Sister Ignatia holds onto it as her only way to survive. This is what makes Sister Ignatia so powerful for so long. She remembers everything and she uses her memories to her own advantage. If Xan remembered the events surrounding the volcanic explosion, she could have fought the Sister long go and helped prevent all of the sadness the Sister spread over the Protectorate. This battle was, after all, a major goal the other witches and sorcerers had for Xan. They left a note in the castle stating, "We only hope that when she meets the Sorrow Eater again, our girl is older, stronger, and more sure of herself. We only hope that, after our sacrifice, she will know what to do" (223). But Xan does not know what to do because she allows herself to lose the ability to help when she allows herself to lose her memories.

The madwoman goes through a hopeless period in her life when she also allows herself to lose any power she may have because she loses her memories. She cannot remember anything about herself or about her past life before being locked away in the Tower. However, despite the fact that she forgets about herself, the madwoman never forgets about the baby that the Elders took away from her. She never gives up the understanding that her baby is alive and living in the forest. This memory remains in the forefront of the madwoman's brain. She never allows herself to forget any detail about that day, which is why she speaks with such clarity the moment Antain enters her cell and asks about that Day of Sacrifice. Although the woman may be mad and locked away, she never allows all of her memories to fade away. This mental strength is what eventually gives her enough knowledge and power to feel hopeful and to escape from the Tower in search of her daughter.

Antain is another character that does not forget. Much like the madwoman, Antain is haunted by constant memories about the day Luna was left in the forest. Antain has constant flashbacks to the screaming mother in the rafters and to the sounds of the Tower door slamming after her mad arrival. He cannot forget the torture and agony he witnessed that day, which is what fuels him to enter the woods in the hopes of ending all the pain. This memory drives Antain to action and his ability to remember the terrible feelings he felt that day provide him with the ability to take his knowledge and try to make a difference that helps him and his people.

Luna is unable to help her people because she does not have any memory of her magical abilities. She could have helped Xan on her journeys and she could have helped the babies make it to the Free Cities faster. However, Luna is stifled, she is controlled by the spell that locks her memories away, and Luna is unable to help anyone because she does not realize they need help. Notice that, as soon as Luna learns about her magic, she springs into action and is able to help rescue people from Sister Ignatia. Meanwhile, Ethyne and her memories from the Tower help the people closest to her. Ethyne holds onto her understanding. She waits for the best possible moment to reveal the truth. This also means that Ethyne is responsible for keeping her memories safely locked away yet fresh in her mind. This alone is what contributes to the freeing of her fellow citizens of the Protectorate.

**Selfishness**

Selfishness is something many of the characters display in this story, but their desperation to preserve their lifestyles leads them to harm others in order to maintain their happiness. Several characters enjoy the lives they have for themselves, and they are willing to fight in order to keep them. Sister Ignatia, for example, wants to live as long as she can, and she knows her life depends on the sorrow of others. For this reason, she is willing to sacrifice the happiness of large masses of people in order to keep her own lifestyle intact. She has no problem sacrificing others' lives to keep her own. Likewise, the Elders make an annual sacrifice in order to keep their lifestyles as they want them. The Council is made up of wealthy and powerful men. These men enjoy luxuries that other families in the Protectorate do not. They can eat much more food for much less labor and they know that their babies will never be a part of the Day of Sacrifice. They love their power and they are a greedy group of men. The Council knows there is no Witch in the forest that wants to eat their babies. They are fully aware that "There never had been a Witch. There were only a dangerous forest and a single road and a thin grip on a life that the Elders had enjoyed for generations" (12). They sacrifice the freedom of the Protectorate and they willingly kill a baby each year just so that they can continue their self-centered and comfortable lives.

However, the villains of this novel are not the only people who are willing to sacrifice others in order to maintain their lifestyle. When Antain's family is threatened, his first reaction is to murder the Witch in the forest. He believes that the Witch is responsible for the supposed deaths during all those Days of Sacrifice, and he is eager to kill a person in order to keep his life happy. In this respect, Antain is no more ethical or noble than the Elders he so harshly judged during his training. To Antain, his comfortable life is more important than the life of the Witch in the forest. One may argue that Antain wants to kill the Witch in order to end everyone's suffering on the Day of Sacrifice. However, if this were the case, Antain could have ventured into the woods at any time in order to stop the sacrifices. Instead, he waits until his baby is in danger to make a change. Antain simply felt sad on the previous sacrificial days, but he never acted for change. He waits until the Witch's death will directly benefit him and those he loves. Xan does not murder anyone, but she is also responsible for sacrificing a person's life in order to preserve her own. Xan locks Luna's magic deep inside her brain. She does this for many reasons, including for Luna's safety, but she also rids Luna of her magic so that she can live a healthier life longer. Xan witnesses the sad change in Luna. She sees that Luna loses her energy and zest for life, yet Xan never attempts to alter the spell. For this, she is willing to make a sacrifice so that she can continue living as she once used to.

**Nature**

Barnhill creates a theme of celestial power and references it throughout the book, which allows readers to appreciate all of the gifts that nature provides the characters in this story. There are several notable references to celestial formations throughout the book, mostly aimed at stars and the moon. To begin, Luna and her mother each have the same crescent moon marks on their foreheads. This seems to be a birthmark from their ancestral village, since Fyrian visits a village where all of the people have the same birthmarks. But the significance of this birthmark is never announced. Readers are never provided with information about what the birthmark means or if it means anything in particular about the people who bar the mark. Luna's connection to the moon continues with her constant consumption of moonlight. Xan accidentally feeds baby Luna with moonlight, which enchants her. However, Luna is thirsty for moonlight, and she drinks more and more of it each night. She does this without understanding that, with each gulp of moonlight, she is expanding and strengthening her magical powers within. But there is a strong celestial connection even before Luna grows obsessed with moonlight. Xan recharges her magic through starlight and usually feeds the sacrificed babies with starlight. This is a significant example of nature providing nourishment.

The inhabitants of the Free Cities notice the charmed starlight in the children, which is why they call the holiday when Xan delivers a baby Star Children Day. What is interesting about Xan choosing starlight as a food source is that most people would think about foods such as berries or flowers since they are in the forest. However, Xan chooses her source of magic to enchant the children. They are fed from a natural force of nature directly from the hands of a helpful Witch that gets her magic from nature as well.

Xan is instantly drawn to Luna in a way that she has never been drawn to any of the other abandoned babies before. Here, she uses celestial references to galaxies to describe baby Luna's eyes as containing “Whole universes burned in those eyes—galaxies upon galaxies” (25). This connection between space and Luna's deep black eyes can be seen again in the name Xan chooses for Luna. Luna comes from Latin, and it means moon. Here is a reference to space that Xan has given to Luna for the rest of her life. It makes sense, then, that Xan was inspired to name her newly adopted granddaughter after the moon since the baby had just consumed several gulps of moonlight prior to her naming. As she ages, Luna continues her affection for the moon through her studies, when she notes that her favorite subject is astronomy and her favorite topic is the moon (133).

However, the celestial connections do not end in the forest with Xan and Luna. They continue in the Protectorate, which is as close to the opposite of Xan's world as one can get. Sister Ignatia moves the magical Tower from the original castle in the forest and she places is directly in the center of the Protectorate. The tower is described as “Mimicking the whorls of galaxies and the trajectories of stars” (44). The deep lines and swirling designs on the Towers edges seem to match the running theme of celestial descriptions in this story. And the connection between the Protectorate and space continue with Sister Ignatia's group of knowledgeable and strong women: the Sisters of the Star. The title of the group is never explained. These women do not seem to be keen students of magic and there is no evidence that they gather starlight to recharge their powers. However, there is an observation deck at the top of the tower, which indicates that the Sisters of the Star either gather their magic at night while no one is watching or that the Sisters simply have an affection for celestial studies.

There is no lesson related to the presence of celestial formations as a running theme for the story. However, Barnhill establishes a close relationship between the storyline and nature, and she proves that the good witches are closely in touch with nature as a force to work with and not against.

**Styles**

**Point of View**

The novel is written in the past-tense, and its narration is in the third person. The narrator is omniscient, and the narrator's focus shifts focus with each chapter. Interspersed chapters, however, come from the first-person point of view of a mother telling her child stories about the Witch that lives in the forest. In one chapter, Luna is the first-person speaker and her subject is Fyrian. Luna tells a story about a girl with no memory and concludes that the story is about her.

Regarding the moral viewpoint of the book, the novel is quite dark, but it is ultimately positive, hopeful, and optimistic. It is a very dark novel with many elements of death and sorrow sprinkled amongst a narrative that aims to deliver the message that hope and knowledge can conquer any evil in the world. While the story has an overall focus on hope as the best possible way to improve life, it teaches this lesson through many dark and disturbing scenes. Barnhill focuses on the importance of hope because she sets up many layers of sorrow. The madwoman in the Tower, for example, describes her time in her cell as torture and there is a scene where Sister Ignatia kills baby birds in front of their mother in order to get enough sorrow to keep traveling (268-69). However, these dark scenes are also uplifted by messages of hope and resilience. The madwoman finds hope when Antain seems to understand her map as something more than a crazy person's scribbles. "Hope and light add motion, her soul whispered. Hope and formation and fusion. Hope and heat and creation. The miracle of gravity. The miracle of transformation" (131). By writing a novel that focuses on hope versus sorrow it alters the traditional narrative of good versus evil. This book still contains elements of light versus dark, but it approaches the concept from a different angle.

**Language and Meaning**

Barnhill uses endless amounts of descriptions related to Mother Nature. In fact, magic itself is drawn from Mother Nature and Xan frequently recharges her energy from starlight and moonlight. Much of the style of writing centers on graphic descriptions of nature and its untouched beauty. Luna is even compared to the beauty of the night sky. When Xan first meets the baby in the forest, she notes that the baby's eyes held "Suns and stars and meteors. The dust of nebulae. Big bangs and black holes and endless, endless Space. The moon rose, big and fat and shining" (25). The comparison between Xan's magic originating from nature while Sister Ignatia's power originated from the forced sorrow of people helps readers understand the element of good Witch versus bad Witch present in this book.

This novel also contains very strong female characters while displaying men as rather weak and submissive. Xan, Sister Ignatia, Ethyne, and Luna are all very strong females. They are strong-willed, independent, and intelligent; and they use their personality traits to live life however they want. Grand Elder Gherland is the most powerful man in the Protectorate, but he is no match for Sister Ignatia. She controls him and tells him what to do in the Protectorate. When the Sister suggests murdering Antain, Gherland agrees despite his sadness. It is no accident, then, that the group with the most power and knowledge, the Sisters of the Star, are all females. This group only admits one young boy into the Tower at a time and that boy serves the Sisters. The women in the Tower dispose of these errand boys often, which further shows female dominance over submissive and controllable men. Even the brave and mighty Antain, who seems ready to fight to the death in the forest, mentions that Ethyne approves of his mission. It seems important to him that he has his wife's permission and it is insinuated that he would not venture out if Ethyne did not approve.

**Structure**

This book contains 48 individually titled chapters. Each chapter is relatively short and the narrator's focus changes each time. The majority of the chapters are narrated by a distant, third person, omniscient narrator. This allows readers to learn more about what each of the characters is thinking and feeling, even if they do not share it with anyone else in the novel. However, a few chapters are told as flashbacks (Chapters 1, 4, 8, 12, 22, 29, 48). These chapters are always told from the first-person limited perspective of an unnamed character who, although she is never named, seems to be the madwoman's mother telling her stories about the Witch when she was a child. There are several flashbacks throughout the novel, but they are clearly understood as flashbacks because they contain a character named Zosimos who is dead at the start of the story. The flashbacks serve as a way for Xan to remember her past and to move forward in helping people today.

The settings change with each chapter as well, with the majority of the chapters bouncing between the Protectorate, the Free Cities, and the forest. The movement of the settings reminds readers that the world in this novel is very divided. The Protectorate is a sad and cloudy place, the forest is dangerous but it makes Xan's family happy, and the Free Cities is a happy place that accepts Xan as a positive helper in their community. These three separate worlds rarely overlap, which is why the separate chapters focuses on only one place at a time.

**Quotes**

Sacrifice one or sacrifice all. That is the way of the world. We couldn’t change it if we tried.”  
-- Narrator (Chapter 1 (“In Which a Story is Told”) ) **Importance**: This comment is made by an unnamed narrator who is part of the oppressed townspeople in the Protectorate. This belief is what the Elders want the people to think. They want the people to believe that sacrificing one baby each year on the Day of Sacrifice will keep everyone safe. Most importantly, the Elders need the townspeople to believe that they cannot change anything. This feeling of powerlessness is what makes the people so easy to control. A group of people who think they are powerless, who feel that they cannot change anything, are the easiest group to control and keep down. The quote above shows why Sister Ignatia and the Council were able to control the people of the Protectorate for so long.

They left knowing that it was not a matter of if the child were eaten by animals, but rather that she surely would be. They left her knowing that there surely wasn’t a witch. There never had been a witch. There were only a dangerous forest and a single road and a thin grip on a life that the elders had enjoyed for generations. The Witch—that is, the belief in her—made for a frightened people, a subdued people, a compliant people, who lived their lives in a saddened haze, the clouds of their grief numbing their senses and dampening their minds. It was terribly convenient for the Elders’ unencumbered rule.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 2 (“In Which an Unfortunate Woman goes Quite Mad”) ) **Importance**: The Elders love their extravagant lives. They love feeling special and comfortable and more successful than the average people in the Protectorate. They love their loves so much that they are unwilling to part from any of the comforts they live with. This group of men are willing to leave a defenseless baby in the woods, knowing that the baby will die a terrible and tragic death due to a lack of adult care. They imagine the baby dies from terrible things like starvation or being attacked by an animal and yet they do nothing to stop it because they love their powerful lifestyles more than anything else. They use the false tale of an evil witch in the forest to make the townspeople dependent on them for their survival. The people believe that the Elders ensure their safety, which makes them feel indebted to the Council. This belief in a nasty witch also leads the people in the Protectorate to trust that the Council is trying to help them. All of these beliefs make it easy for the Elders to control the city and keep it exactly as Sister Ignatia and the Council want it: too sad and deflated to consider fighting back.

The path to Truth is in the dreaming heart.”  
-- Glerk (Chapter 3 (“In Which a Witch Accidentally Enmagics an Infant”) ) **Importance**: Glerk loves poetry, and he often speaks in figurative language. Here, he mentions truth, which is ironic because both Xan and himself do not remember the truth. Each of them has allowed themselves to forget their past. They cannot remember the things they have lived through, which means they cannot remember the full truth. Xan finds more and more of her past truth as she allows herself to hope for answers. The innocence of a dreaming heart is what helps a person remember and what helps them find the real answers. The people of the Protectorate do not dream. They have no hopes or ambitions other than surviving their mediocre lives. Their lack of hope is why they are unable to see the truth about the Protectorate, which is why Ethyne's exposure to the truth later on creates such a happy and hopeful population.

There is so much beauty. How can you possibly think about anything else?”  
-- Xan (Chapter 7 (“In Which a Magical Child is More Trouble by Half”) ) **Importance**: Xan is the eternal optimist in this story and the opposite of Sister Ignatia. She is able to see the great things lying around her and she makes positive events out of sad ones. For example, Xan is able to transform the depressing Day of Sacrifice into the Star Child holiday in the Free Cities. She is a positive force that alters a bad event, such as sacrificing a baby, into a happy event, such as adopting a new child. Her optimism positively affects her family and keeps everyone living in the middle of the forest feeling hopeful.

Memory was a slippery thing—slick moss on an unstable slope—and it was ever so easy to lose one’s footing and fall.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 7 (“In Which a Magical Child is More Trouble by Half”)) **Importance**: The theme of lost memories harming a person is a strong idea in this novel, and this quote reminds readers of just how easy it is for people to lose their memories. Both Xan and Glerk note that they have forgotten large chunks of their past, yet they do not even know how or when they forgot them. In this novel, it is as if memories are alive and leave a person if they do not pay attention to it. Here, Barnhill compares memories to something that is so slippery it is difficult to keep. Many of the characters in this novel find their own memories to be quite slippery as well, and their reminders of the past leave them.

This is why it doesn’t pay to be brave. Bravery makes nothing, protects nothing, results in nothing. It only makes you dead. And this is why we don’t stand up to the Witch.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 8 (“In Which a Story Contains a Hint of Truth”) ) **Importance**: Here is a good example of why Sister Ignatia and the Council were so easily able to control the townspeople of the Protectorate. The people have no hope. They do not think anything is worth fighting for. Nothing is worth resistance, which means that no one resists. But this can also be seen as a comment about Zosimos, who is arguably the bravest character in the book despite the fact that he is dead the entire time. That is just the point. Like this quote warns, brave Zosimos is dead. That is all. He flew into the volcano many years ago with the brave intention of saving everyone. He saved many people but he did not save everyone. His bravery left him dead and not much else. Xan never honors his memory by sharing his story. The evil Witch is still causing sorrow. People are still hurting. It might seem as though Zosimos' bravery was all for nothing.

Knowledge, after all, is a precious commodity.”  
-- Sister Ignatia (Chapter 13 (“In Which Antain Pays a Visit”) ) **Importance**: The immense power of knowledge is a huge theme in this book, and Sister Ignatia, Ethyne, and the madwoman are the best examples of this. Sister Ignatia is the most knowledgable person in the Protectorate. She lives among the knowledge provided to her in the only books in the land and she uses her knowledge to get everything she wants. In fact, Sister Ignatia uses her own knowledge to prevent others from gaining enough knowledge to challenge her. Ethyne uses her knowledge to liberate and educate others. Her personal powers of observation lead her to a long awaited day of liberation. She holds on to her knowledge of who Sister Ignatia really is, and Ethyne patiently waits for the best moment to reveal the information. She uses her own understanding to help others because Ethyne understands better than anyone else that the only way to save the people of the Protectorate is to teach them how to help themselves. Sister Ignatia knows this, which is why she keeps knowledge hidden away and reserved only for her. But the Sister is unable to keep knowledge away from the madwoman. In fact, she never tries to prevent the madwoman from learning because she assumes the woman is too sad to try. Sister Ignatia never expects the madwoman in the Tower to fight back by understanding the scheme she has put together. Once the madwoman discovers what Sister Ignatia needs from her, she is able to starve the Witch and cause her much grief. This ultimately helps lead to the Sister's destruction and the liberation of the Protectorate.

And the things that they did not speak of began to outweigh the things that they did. Each secret, each unspoken thing was round and hard and heavy and cold, like a stone hung around the necks of both grandmother and girl. Their backs bent under the weight of secrets.”  
-- Narrator (Chapter 19 (“In Which there is a Journey to the Town of Agony”) ) **Importance**: If memories and knowledge lead people to freedom, secrets prevent people from it as well. Secrets and lies mean that a person does not get the full story of something. They mean that someone is not given all of the knowledge they may want or need. This makes Luna enraged. She wants to know everything. She thinks she deserves to know everything. To her, the lies become a burden and they consume her thoughts. There is also a reference to Sister Ignatia here. In this quote, secrets and lies condense into cold, hard, and heavy things. At the end of the novel, Sister Ignatia's sorrow is a cold, hard, and heavy pearl where her heart used to be. The Sister has been carrying the weight of her trapped sorrow, her secret, for so long that, when it finally explodes, it destroys her and renders her too weak to fight.

Time was a tricky thing—as slippery as mud.”  
-- Narrator (Chapter 21 (“In Which Fyrian Makes a Discovery”)) **Importance**: The majority of the characters in this novel live hundreds of years. They have many more memories than the average human might, which contributes to the cause of their forgetfulness. Xan, for example, has lived roughly 500 years. She cannot remember most of her past or her childhood, and this makes Xan an incomplete person until she searches for answers. Glerk is much older than Xan, older than magic itself, and he is also unable to keep his memories close to him. In this novel, memories are closely linked to time and both are hard to hold on to. This quote comes from Fyrian's flashback/dream to his time with Xan when she was just a young girl. Even Fyrian is a victim of time and memories flying away from him. He does not know how old he is, how long his mother has been dead, or how long he has been under Xan's care. This dream frustrates him because it its the first time when Fyrian realizes that he has lost a part of himself as well. The final character that is greatly influenced by a loss of time is the madwoman in the Tower. She knows that her time in the cell is what contributes most to her madness. She no longer has concept of days or years, and this lack of measure results in the madwoman feeling lost in the world. Time has truly slipped away from her and she does not know how to get it back.

A story can tell the truth, she knew, but a story can also lie. Stories can bend and twist and obfuscate. Controlling stories is power indeed.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 38 (“In Which the Fog Begins to Lift”) ) **Importance**: The idea of controlling stories is closely related to the theme of knowledge in this novel. If a person controls a story, if a person manipulates that story, then knowledge is taken away from the people who believe it. Sister Ignatia tells a grand lie to a great number of people. She starts her lie by telling people that the Protectorate is for them and for their safety. She continues to manipulate knowledge through false stories by spreading rumors about how terrible the Witch in the forest is. These tales help the Sister gain power while simultaneously taking away knowledge from the townspeople in the Protectorate. Sister Ignatia controls the narrative the Protectorate, which gives her all the power she will ever need. As soon as that narrative is changed and replaced with the truth Ethyne shares, the Sister's power is taken away and replaced with the people's newly-found power.

Knowledge is powerful, but it is a terrible power when it is hoarded and hidden. Today, knowledge is for everyone.”  
-- Ethyne (Chapter 38 (“In Which the Fog Begins to Lift”) ) **Importance**: Ethyne makes the largest contribution to liberating the Protectorate. She uses knowledge to defeat the Council while also using it to save the townspeople who are starving for it. She alone understands the need for the townspeople to know the truth. She alone knows that their world will change if they are made aware of what is happening around them and to them. She wants the people to save themselves. Ethyne wants to put an end to the oppression. She knows that, if she can teach people the truth, Sister Ignatia's only weapon will be destroyed.

How many feelings can one heart hold? She looked at her grandmother. At her mother. At the man protecting his family. Infinite, Luna thought. The way the universe is infinite. It is light and dark and endless motion; it is space and time, and space within space, and time within time. And she knew: there is no limit to what the heart can carry.”  
-- Narrator (Chapter 45 (“In Which a Simply Enormous Dragon Makes a Simply Enormous Decision”) ) **Importance**: Luna's heart is quite a lot different from Sister Ignatia's. The Sister allowed her heart to wither and condense into a tiny heavy and cold pearl in her chest. She chose to lock away her pain and her memories, and Sister Ignatia kept her secret from everyone. Luna, on the other hand, keeps an open heart. She allows love into her life, and she makes room for new people like her mother, Adara. Luna understands that her heart will be able to withstand all of the love and open feelings she allows herself to feel. This quote is also connected to Xan's journey into the Bog with Glerk, who claims that the Bog is all things and all things are the Bog. This idea of an infinite universe that contains both good and bad, or light and dark, connects the idea that Xan has gone into her afterlife in an infinite place. Things to not truly end. A heart does not run out of room. Things are infinite, just like the universe.