

Howl's Moving Castle



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DIANA WYNNE JONES

Jones was born in London, England, the first child of two schoolteachers. However, her parents were neglectful—so to help her younger sisters cope, Jones began writing stories as a young child. She went on to study English at St. Anne's College, where both C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien lectured. The same year she graduated, Jones married her husband, a scholar of medieval literature. Around the time her third child was born, Jones began writing, first plays, then an adult novel, and finally, children's and young adult novels. She went on to publish nearly a book per year until her death. Jones is best known for her fantasy books for young readers, particularly for *Howl's Moving Castle*, the *Chronicles of Chrestomanci* series, and her tongue-in-cheek exploration of fantasy tropes, *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*. Despite publishing prolifically, Jones never became a household name, and by the 1990s, several of her novels were out of print. However, they were revived and republished once J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books spurred a new push for children's fantasy. Following this her profile rose throughout the 2000s, particularly after Japanese filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki adapted *Howl's Moving Castle* into a critically acclaimed animated film in 2004. Jones continued to write and publish up until her death in 2011 of lung cancer. Her sister Ursula Jones, who's also a children's author, finished the novel Jones was writing when she died, *The Islands of Chaldea*, in 2014.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As a fantasy novel that takes place in a fictional world, *Howl's Moving Castle* draws heavily on traditional fantasy tropes. Setting a novel entirely in a pseudo-medieval fantasy world, for instance (rather than having characters enter a fantasy world and then return to the real world, as in a novel like J. M. Barrie's [Peter Pan](#)), is a trope that J. R. R. Tolkien popularized in *The Lord of the Rings*. However, Jones was known for subverting tropes like this. The fact that Howl originally came to Ingary from 1980s Wales is a prime example of Jones combining elements of more modern, Tolkien-esque fantasy with earlier fantasy tropes. The Wales that Jones portrays reflects life in the mid-1980s, when the novel was written. Neil is engrossed in computer games, which were becoming increasingly popular—especially ones with high fantasy settings and storylines, such as *The Legend of Zelda* (it was released in 1986, the same year *Howl's Moving Castle* was published). Calcifer's "silly saucepan song," meanwhile, is likely "Sosban Fach," a Welsh folk song that Welsh rugby fans often sing.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Howl's Moving Castle is the first of what's known as the Howl Series; it's followed by *Castle in the Air* and *House of Many Ways*, which take place in the same fictional world but follow different protagonists. Jones has written more than 40 other novels for children and young adults. As a college student, Jones attended lectures given by C. S. Lewis (*The Chronicles of Narnia* series) and J. R. R. Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*), and she was inspired by their work—though she also made a name for herself by parodying and making fun of traditional fantasy tropes in *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*. She's inspired other contemporary fantasy authors, particularly Neil Gaiman ([The Graveyard Book](#), [The Ocean at the End of the Lane](#))—he dedicated one of his books to her. Within the novel itself, the curse that the Witch of the Waste places on Howl is actually the text of John Donne's 1633 poem "Go and catch a falling star." The novel also includes a reference to Shakespeare's famous play [Hamlet](#), as well as one to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. Other children's novels that deal with fairy-tale tropes include Gail Carson Levine's *Ella Enchanted* and *Tuesdays at the Castle* by Jessica Day George.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Howl's Moving Castle
- **When Written:** 1985–1986
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1986
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fantasy
- **Setting:** The fictional Kingdom of Ingary
- **Climax:** Sophie frees Calcifer from his contract and revives Howl. As she does, the curse the Witch of the Waste put on her lifts, returning Sophie to her teenage self.
- **Antagonist:** The Witch of the Waste and her fire demon, Miss Angorian
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Phoenix. While *Howl's Moving Castle* was nominated for several awards at the time of its publication, it didn't win any. However, in 2006, it won a Phoenix Award, which is given to children's or young adult books that, like *Howl's Moving Castle*, didn't win any awards when they were published. Books are eligible for Phoenix awards in their 20th year after publication.



PLOT SUMMARY

In the magical land of Ingary, teenage Sophie knows she's destined to fail in life because she's the eldest of three children. So it's no surprise to Sophie when, after her father dies, her stepmother Fanny sends the youngest daughter Martha (who's destined to be successful) to apprentice with the witch Mrs. Fairfax, the middle sister Lettie to be an apprentice at the local bakery, and takes Sophie on as an apprentice in the family hat shop. Sophie is good at sewing and trimming hats, and the hat shop is soon doing very well. But Sophie grows increasingly shy and feels like an old lady, as she never has anyone to talk to. Finally, on May Day, Sophie works up her courage to go visit Lettie. The crowds are upsetting, and Sophie is terrified when a handsome man in a blue and silver suit offers to buy her a drink. At the bakery, Sophie is shocked: Lettie and Martha have switched places, and Martha insists that Fanny is exploiting Sophie.

A few weeks later, a grand lady who turns out to be the evil Witch of the Waste enters the hat shop, inexplicably says she doesn't appreciate competition, and curses Sophie to become a 90-year-old woman. Since Sophie can't tell anyone she's under a spell, she decides to leave. She toddles out of Market Chipping, speaks kindly to a scarecrow, and finds a **walking stick** when she rescues a dog from some brambles. After nightfall, desperate for someplace to warm up, she spots a frightening sight: the moving castle that belongs to evil Wizard Howl, who supposedly eats young girls' hearts. Figuring she's safe because she's old, Sophie shouts for the castle to stop and finds one door that opens. She tells Howl's assistant, a teenage boy named Michael, that she needs Howl's help and is prepared to wait for Howl all night. She spends the night by the fire and in the middle of the night, Howl's fire demon, Calcifer, observes that Sophie is under a spell. The two strike a deal: if Sophie can break the contract between Howl and Calcifer that binds Calcifer to the hearth, then Calcifer will break the curse on Sophie. However, Calcifer can't tell Sophie anything about the terms of the contract—she'll have to figure it out.

In the morning, Sophie is shocked to discover that Howl is the young man who tried to buy her a drink on May Day. Since the castle is absolutely disgusting, Sophie decides to pose as a cleaning lady; this way, she can stick around and discover the terms of Calcifer and Howl's contract. Fortunately, the castle is quite small: it's actually Howl's home in Porthaven, but the door can open to four different places (the moors, Porthaven, Kingsbury, and someplace mysterious). Over the next few days, as Sophie scrubs, she discovers that Howl is vain and arrogant. Calcifer and Michael do most of the work, while Howl spends his days out courting. Howl is also working hard to avoid being hired by the King to find two missing men, Prince Justin and Wizard Suliman—both of whom the Witch kidnapped recently. The scarecrow Sophie spoke to tries twice to enter the castle,

but Calcifer and Howl tell it to go away.

Soon, Sophie discovers that Michael is dating Martha (who's still posing as Lettie), while Howl is dating the real Lettie. Worried for Lettie, Sophie convinces Michael to take her to Mrs. Fairfax's house in Upper Folding to warn Lettie. They take seven-league boots, hoping to get there before Howl—but Lettie is already visiting with Howl and looks very much in love when they arrive. Michael helps Mrs. Fairfax corral a dog, which she says keeps trying to bite Howl.

That afternoon, Michael asks Sophie for help with a spell. The spell gives instructions that seem impossible to complete, but Sophie suggests they try to accomplish the first instruction: catching a falling star. Though Sophie and Michael get close to catching a star, they're unsuccessful. When Howl gets home later, sees the spell, and learns what Sophie and Michael did, he takes them both through the mysterious door into a land called Wales. There, he visits his sister, Megan, and her family. The "spell" is actually her son Neil's English homework, and the spell Michael was supposed to work on is now with Neil's English teacher, Miss Angorian. Miss Angorian turns out to be young and beautiful, and she reads what turns out to be a poem by John Donne. Howl flirts with her and when he returns to the castle, he reveals that the Witch put a spell on him. Now, it's catching up—they're just waiting for the impossible things in the poem to occur.

The following day, since the King wants to appoint Howl Royal Magician, Howl takes Sophie to badmouth him to the King. First, he takes Sophie to visit his old tutor, Mrs. Pentstemmon, to practice speaking to a powerful person. Mrs. Pentstemmon tells Sophie that Sophie has the magical power to "talk life" into things, such as her walking stick. She also tells Sophie to break Howl's contract with Calcifer so that Howl doesn't become evil; a contract with a fire demon is what made the Witch of the Waste go bad. Then, Sophie visits the king. She's unsuccessful: the King appoints Howl Royal Magician and tasks him with finding Prince Justin. As Sophie tries to find her way back to the moving castle after this, she runs into the Witch—who's just come from killing Mrs. Pentstemmon.

Michael is terrified of the Witch's curse, but Howl is just upset about Mrs. Pentstemmon. However, Howl is also spending a lot of time in Wales, no doubt courting Miss Angorian—and spending so much time in the rain gives him an awful cold. He still insists on going to the funeral, however. While Howl is sleeping, someone knocks at the castle door and a greyhound enters. It turns into a man, says Lettie sent him to watch over Sophie, asks Sophie to not tell Howl, and then turns into an Irish Setter.

Howl goes to the funeral disguised as a dog—and comes home with the Witch in pursuit. Once he's escaped her, he says they must move Calcifer and change where the castle's doors open. He decides to buy the former hat shop in Market Chipping; they can sell flowers. Once the move is complete, the castle's

doors open onto Market Chipping, a rundown mansion, a field of flowers, and Wales. While everyone else is asleep that night, Sophie learns that Calcifer was once a falling star.

Running the flower shop is easy: Sophie and Michael collect flowers from outside the castle's moving entrance and sell them in Market Chipping. However, Sophie isn't happy. She becomes increasingly unhappy when the scarecrow tries to enter the flower shop, but it goes away when Sophie tells it to. That same day, the dog-man manages to turn back into a person momentarily and shares that Lettie knows Sophie is under a spell. Finally, Miss Angorian calls at the castle—but, jealous and annoyed, Sophie sends her away. By now, Sophie is in such a temper that when Howl comments on her new sheepdog, Sophie snaps that it's a cursed man. Howl and Calcifer turn the dog back into a man named Percival; Michael is convinced he's actually Prince Justin. To try to improve Sophie's mood, Howl sends Sophie to kill weeds in front of the mansion with Percival. Percival implies that he didn't actually get to Sophie in time to protect her from Howl's charm—and Sophie discovers, to her dismay, that both Howl and Michael know she's under a curse and have been trying to lift it. Howl insists Sophie is keeping the curse on herself, but Sophie is so enraged that she vows to leave the next day.

The next day is Midsummer Day, so Sophie spends her morning picking flowers and making garlands while Howl, who spent the night drinking, sleeps. Just as she prepares to leave around midday, Fanny, Martha, Mrs. Fairfax, and Lettie all show up—and they all know Sophie is cursed. Miss Angorian joins the party, but she soon goes outside to admire the flowers. Suddenly, Calcifer shouts that the Witch found Megan's family, so Howl races out of bed to rescue them. Soon after, the scarecrow shows up, but Calcifer insists it means no harm. As the scarecrow enters, the Witch's voice booms through the castle: she has Miss Angorian in the Waste, and Howl must come rescue her.

Fearing Howl won't forgive her if his latest love dies, Sophie puts on the seven-league boots and hurries to the Waste. There, the Witch shows Sophie the perfect man she's creating out of body parts from Wizard Suliman and Prince Justin; she just needs Howl's head to complete her project. When Howl bursts in moments later with the scarecrow, the Witch disintegrates. As Howl and Sophie race back to the castle, Howl explains that Miss Angorian is the Witch's fire demon, and she's power hungry. As they enter the castle, Miss Angorian picks Calcifer out of the hearth and squeezes the black thing he's attached to—it's Howl's heart. Howl faints. Sophie tells her stick to hit only Miss Angorian and scoops Calcifer up. She breaks the contract by telling him to live another thousand years, plucking him off of Howl's heart, and putting the heart back into Howl. As she does this, she turns back into a teenager. When Howl comes to, he crumbles the Witch's heart, causing Miss Angorian to disappear—and where the scarecrow and

Percival were, Prince Justin and Wizard Suliman appear. Sophie and Howl decide to live "happily ever after," and Calcifer returns to the hearth. He's happy to stay, as long as he can come and go as he pleases.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sophie Hatter – The protagonist of the novel, Sophie is the eldest of three sisters—so she believes she's destined to be a failure. Sophie isn't surprised when her stepmother Fanny takes Sophie on as an apprentice in the family hat shop. Sophie soon attracts the attention of the evil Witch of the Waste—who curses Sophie to become an old woman. Sophie figures the new persona fits, but she also becomes far more confident as an old woman. Sophie seeks refuge in Wizard Howl's moving castle, where she strikes a deal with his fire demon Calcifer: if she breaks the contract between Howl and Calcifer, Calcifer will lift her curse. Posing as a cleaning lady, Sophie sews, cleans, and looks for clues to figure out how the contract works. Though Sophie is unwilling to admit it, she develops a crush on Howl. Sophie also learns that she's a witch with a unique gift: she can talk to things and bring them to life. Using this gift, Sophie manages to break Howl and Calcifer's curse during the novel's final battle. She gives Calcifer his own life rather than leaving him to live off of Howl's heart, and she gives Howl his heart back. Once the curse lifts, Sophie and Howl decide to live happily ever after.

Wizard Howl – Howl is a 27-year-old wizard who lives in a moving castle. Most people believe he's evil, as he supposedly eats girls' hearts. This is, however, exaggerated: Howl regularly breaks girls' hearts, but he doesn't eat them. Rather, Howl is trying to make himself look bad so the King doesn't send him to look for Prince Justin or Wizard Suliman. Much of Howl's power comes from a contract he made with a fire demon, Calcifer, though he's a skilled wizard in his own right. However, when Sophie moves in posing as the cleaning lady, she discovers that Howl is vain, self-absorbed, and dramatic—he spends hours in the bathroom each morning and throws a tantrum when he dyes his hair the wrong color. But Sophie also discovers that Howl is generous, compassionate, and loyal. The Witch of the Waste sent a curse after Howl a year before the novel begins, and Sophie manages to save Howl from the curse. However, once Sophie manages to thwart the curse and break Howl's contract with Calcifer, one part of the curse does come true: Howl can finally commit to one woman. He and Sophie plan to live "happily ever after" together.

Calcifer – Calcifer is Howl's fire demon. He's bound to Howl's hearth by a contract—and he promises to lift the curse on Sophie if she figures out how to break the contract between him and Howl. Despite being an evil-looking demon, Calcifer is

caring, kind, and usually willing to offer up tidbits of information. Within the castle, he acts as a judge of character: Howl mostly allows anyone in the castle, so long as Calcifer likes them (and Calcifer often likes people who treat him like a person, rather than as an evil demon or as though he doesn't exist). He feels lonely and constricted in the hearth and desperately wants to see what the world is like beyond it. Throughout the novel, he drops several hints to Sophie about the terms of his contract, such as that Howl is "heartless" and that Calcifer was once a falling star. Sophie breaks the contract at the end of the novel, when she "talks life" into Calcifer. This means he no longer has to rely on Howl's heart to keep him alive, and it frees Calcifer. But Calcifer decides to return to the hearth, provided he can come and go.

The Witch of the Waste – The antagonist of the novel, the Witch of the Waste is an old woman who lives out in the middle of a wasteland known as the Waste. She made a deal with a fire demon, which has enabled her to live a very long life in the form of a much younger woman. While Sophie finds the Witch cruel and calculating (the Witch puts a curse on Sophie, after all), Howl suggests that the Witch is actually a sympathetic figure: she's just unloved. Despite this, the Witch engages in behavior that horrifies Sophie, such as murdering Mrs. Pentstemmon and trying to assemble a perfect human out of body parts taken from Wizard Suliman, Prince Justin, and Howl. Howl spends much of the novel trying to evade a curse the Witch sends after him which, when it "takes," will allow her to use Howl's head on her perfect human. However, it's ultimately revealed that much of the Witch's diabolical plan is actually the work of her fire demon, Miss Angorian. The Witch crumbles into a pile of bones at the end of the novel and Howl later crushes her heart, thereby killing Miss Angorian.

Miss Angorian – At first, Miss Angorian appears as Neil's new English teacher in Wales—but really, she's the Witch of the Waste's fire demon. She's a beautiful young woman, with shiny black hair, olive skin, and big eyes. She's sharp, cold, and rejects Howl's romantic advances, insisting instead that she's still devoted to Ben Sullivan, her missing fiancé. For her part, Sophie fully believes that Howl is courting Miss Angorian and in love with her. However, it eventually comes out that anything to do with Miss Angorian's love life is a lie. The Witch of the Waste and her fire demon have a similar contract as Howl and Calcifer, wherein the fire demon is kept alive because it has access to the Witch's heart. Howl discovers that rather than this being an equal partnership, Miss Angorian has been in control of the Witch for some time—and Miss Angorian plans to kill the Witch and enter into a new contract with a perfect human she's constructed from various parts of Howl, Prince Justin, and Wizard Suliman. Though she successfully kills the witch, Howl ultimately kills Miss Angorian by crushing the Witch's heart.

Michael – Michael is Howl's teenage apprentice. He's a kind,

handsome boy, and he's in love with and plans to marry Martha Hatter (though he knows her as Lettie). Michael performs most of the grunt work around the castle, such as putting spells together and selling them to customers. He adores Howl, as Howl took him in several years ago after Michael was orphaned. By working with Calcifer, he attempts to manage some of Howl's bad impulses; for instance, Michael tries to keep money hidden so there's money to live on, since Howl often spends all the money he earns on clothes. Despite Michael's good heart, he's often a bit clueless—he initially thinks Howl is dead when Howl throws a dramatic tantrum and fills the castle with green slime. But Sophie grows to love and appreciate Michael, as he's loyal, generous, and genuinely loves and cares about his chosen family.

Lettie Hatter – Lettie is Martha and Sophie's middle sister. She's considered the most beautiful, and she's also the most ambitious—though as the second-born, she's not destined for greatness. Because of this, when the girls' father dies, Fanny apprentices Lettie to the local bakery; Lettie will be able to marry and live a mediocre life. However, Lettie and Martha switch places, so Lettie ultimately apprentices with the witch Mrs. Fairfax. Soon after Sophie turns into an old woman, Howl begins courting Lettie—but when Lettie lets on that Sophie is her sister, Howl continues to court her but is really just trying to get information out of her about Sophie. For her part, Lettie is concerned for Sophie's safety, so she sends Percival, the dogman, to protect Sophie from Howl. Lettie seems to be in love with Percival, but at the end of the novel, when Percival turns back into the two men who made him up (Prince Justin and Wizard Suliman), Lettie accepts Wizard Suliman's offer to take her as an apprentice.

Martha Hatter – Martha is Sophie and Lettie's younger sister; she's Fanny's biological daughter. As the third-born, Martha is supposedly destined to be wildly successful. Because of this, when her father dies, Fanny apprentices Martha to Mrs. Fairfax; this will give Martha the best chance at success. However, what Sophie and Fanny don't realize is that Martha isn't very ambitious. She just wants to get married and have 10 children. To achieve this goal, she and Lettie switch places so that Martha is actually apprenticed at a local bakery. There, she meets Michael and falls in love with him. When Sophie initially visits Martha and discovers her sisters switched places, Martha expresses concern for Sophie: she believes Fanny is exploiting her.

Fanny – Fanny is Sophie and Lettie's stepmother and Martha's mother. She was a young, pretty shop assistant at the hat shop when Sophie's father married her, and she made a point to treat all three of her daughters exactly the same. A sensible and practical woman, Fanny finds all three girls apprenticeships when her husband dies and money gets tight. However, she and Sophie both misjudge Lettie and Martha: Martha isn't as ambitious as they expect her to be, while Lettie is wildly

ambitious. Martha also tells Sophie that she believes Fanny is exploiting Sophie to run the hat shop while she spends lots of money. Because Sophie briefly believes this, she leaves home after the Witch curses her without saying goodbye to Fanny. Fanny ultimately marries a wealthy man and, when she reconnects with Sophie, makes it clear that Sophie and Martha misjudged her. Indeed, with her new perspective as an old woman, Sophie sympathizes with Fanny: Fanny is still young and beautiful, and she was no doubt as bored at the hat shop as Sophie was.

Mrs. Fairfax – Mrs. Fairfax is a witch, an old friend of Fanny’s, and she takes Lettie on as an apprentice. She’s a maternal-looking blond woman, and from her home in Upper Folding, Mrs. Fairfax crafts spells that use honey from her bees. Initially, Mrs. Fairfax takes Martha on as an apprentice—but when she discovers that Martha and Lettie have used a spell to switch places and identities, she tells Lettie to become her true self. She’d rather teach someone who wants to learn. Despite being successful, Mrs. Fairfax insinuates that she’s not a particularly advanced witch. She encourages Lettie to court Howl in the hopes that Howl might offer to teach her, and she later encourages Lettie to accept Wizard Suliman’s offer to teach her. However, Mrs. Fairfax is adept at identifying curses: she knows who Sophie is when Sophie visits, posing as Lettie’s great-aunt; and she realizes that Percival is also under a curse.

The Dog-Man/Percival – Percival is, unbeknownst to him, a combination of Wizard Suliman and Prince Justin’s body parts. The Witch of the Waste assembles the men into two bodies, one that’s her perfect human and the other, Percival, whom she uses as a servant. As a person, Percival doesn’t remember who he is or much about his past. He’s a red-headed man with absolutely no personality, spark, or defining characteristics. When the Witch has had enough of Percival, she curses him to become a dog and turns him out. He seeks out Lettie and then, with her prodding, Sophie—he’s supposed to protect Sophie from Howl. He occasionally turns back into a person to dispense information, and when he turns back into a dog, he becomes a different breed each time. Howl eventually discovers that the dog in the house is a cursed human and returns Percival to his human state. Percival disappears at the end of the novel, when Wizard Suliman and Prince Justin are magically put back together.

Wizard Suliman/Benjamin Sullivan – Wizard Suliman was the King’s Royal Magician until the Witch kidnapped him and he disappeared into the Waste. He came from Wales, like Howl, and was originally named Benjamin Sullivan. Suliman was the first to begin trying to fight the Witch by planting flowers on the edge of the Waste. When he was kidnapped, he hid some of his magic and personality in a scarecrow, which he tasked with finding the rest of his body parts—the Witch plans to use parts of Suliman’s body to create her perfect human. The non-perfect parts make up parts of Percival, while Howl purchases what

turns out to be Suliman’s skull on a whim. At the end of the novel, once Suliman has been returned to his body, he takes Lettie on as an apprentice.

Mrs. Pentstemmon – Mrs. Pentstemmon is an elderly, renowned witch in Ingary. She trained both Wizard Suliman and Howl, though Howl was her last (and best) student. Mrs. Pentstemmon is very invested in Howl’s moral state, and she encourages Sophie to break Howl’s contract with Calcifer so Howl can remain good. She also is the first to inform Sophie that she herself has magical powers. However, hours after Sophie visits Mrs. Pentstemmon, the Witch of the Waste kills the old lady—Mrs. Pentstemmon wouldn’t tell the Witch something about Howl. Because Howl respects and idolizes Mrs. Pentstemmon so much, he insists on going to her funeral in disguise.

Megan Parry – Megan is Howl’s sister; she lives in Wales with her husband and two children, Mari and Neil. Megan and Howl have a difficult relationship, as Megan feels like Howl is abusing her kindness and support by storing things at her house and doing nothing with the education she helped pay for. (She doesn’t know about Howl’s successful life in Ingary.) Once Sophie sees how condescending and disapproving Megan is when she speaks to Howl, she understands how and why Howl has turned into a “slitherer-outer”—Megan is intimidating.

Prince Justin – Prince Justin is the King’s younger brother. After fighting with the King, Justin disguises himself, goes looking for Wizard Suliman, and is ultimately kidnapped by the Witch. The Witch plans to use parts of Justin’s body to create her perfect human. At the end of the novel, Justin is returned to his body.

The Count of Catterack – The Count of Catterack is a small, nervous man who runs off with Jane Farrier. At one point, Sophie sells him a fake spell to help him win a duel, not realizing who he is. She later learns that he was supposed to be looking for the missing Prince Justin when he met Jane.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mari Parry – Mari is Howl’s young niece and Megan’s daughter. She lives in Wales, and she and Howl have a close, loving relationship.

Neil Parry – Neil is Howl’s nephew; he lives with his mother Megan and sister Mari in 1980s Wales. He’s obsessed with computer games and has a fraught relationship with Howl—Howl must bribe him with one-of-a-kind computer games to get Neil to be at all helpful.

The King – The King of Ingary is an unassuming, middle-aged man who nevertheless acts like he’s extremely smart and powerful. He’s desperate to track down his brother, Prince Justin, and the Royal Wizard, Wizard Suliman, after they’re both kidnapped by the Witch of the Waste—so he gives Howl the task.

Jane Farrier – Jane Farrier is a plain young woman who lives in Market Chipping. She becomes the talk of the town when, after purchasing a fussy, pleated, mushroom-colored bonnet from Sophie, she runs off with the Count of Catterack.

Princess Valeria – Princess Valeria is the King's baby daughter; she's just starting to walk and has a few teeth.

Mr. Sacheverell Smith – Fanny marries the wealthy Mr. Smith sometime after Sophie leaves the hat shop. He never appears in person in the novel.



APPEARANCES AND ASSUMPTIONS

In *Howl's Moving Castle*, few things are as they seem. Old people look young, young people look old, kings and princes look unassuming, and unlikely heroes appear evil. By presenting so many people, non-human beings, and objects that defy all expectations, the novel highlights the problems that come with prejudging someone. In some cases, a person's inclination to make assumptions simply reflects their upbringing. For instance, Sophie, who's from Market Chipping, has been raised to believe that Wizard Howl is evil—so evil that he literally eats girls' hearts and steals their souls. However, she learns later that Howl isn't at all evil, and that the rumors are ones that he allowed to spread specifically in Market Chipping to make himself look bad (he doesn't want to attract too much attention for looking good). It takes Sophie almost a month, however, to not only believe that Howl isn't evil, but also to be able to voice to others that he's kind and compassionate. In other cases, people's assumptions reflect their fears or their selfishness. Sophie is terrified of the scarecrow that continues to call at the moving castle, believing it's evil, and it's only when she's willing to stop and think more critically about it that she learns the scarecrow contains part of the missing Wizard Suliman and is on the side of good. Similarly, it takes Howl about a week to realize that the dog Sophie takes in isn't actually a dog—he's a man cursed to take a dog's form. This is something Howl would've noticed immediately, other characters insist, had he not been so vain and caught up in his own world. Being able to look critically at someone and notice what they're hiding, the novel suggests, not only makes one a better person—it's the only way one can provide other people the help they actually need.



FAMILY

In many ways, *Howl's Moving Castle* is a story about family—about the difficulties of maintaining relationships with one's blood family, and of the power of chosen family members to fill gaps left by one's blood family. Howl has a strained relationship with his sister, Megan, who believes Howl is wasting his education and doing nothing with his life. But Megan believes this in part because she lives in Wales (which isn't magical) and doesn't know about the close chosen family Howl has built for himself in the magical world of Ingary. There, Howl acts as a father figure and mentor to his teenage apprentice, Michael. And Howl and his fire demon Calcifer have a close, if somewhat strained, relationship, due to the fact that they have a contract that binds Calcifer to Howl's hearth. Teenage Sophie ultimately joins Howl's chosen family after the Witch of the Waste curses Sophie to become elderly. Sophie fears that her stepmother and sisters won't understand or even recognize her in her new form, so it seems like a better idea to simply leave them without saying goodbye. However, Sophie ultimately gets the best of both worlds when, at the end



THEMES

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DESTINY VS. FREE WILL

Howl's Moving Castle follows 18-year-old Sophie, the eldest of three sisters who live in the fictional kingdom of Ingary. In Ingary, it's considered a terrible fate to be the eldest of three children: the eldest is destined to "fail first, and worst." So Sophie simply accepts it as fate when the evil Witch of the Waste curses Sophie to become an old lady, as Sophie figures it's just part of her destiny. Destiny, according to Sophie, isn't worth fighting: it will do what it wants, and all she can do is sigh and move on.

However, Sophie is the only one in the novel who accepts destiny as an inarguable fact—and for the most part, other characters manage to thwart destiny to make themselves happy. For instance, as the youngest of three, Sophie's sister Martha is supposedly destined to be wildly successful, and to help her become successful, the girls' mother Fanny apprentices Martha to a witch. But Martha actually just wants to get married and have children, so she and Lettie, the ambitious (but destined to be mediocre) middle sister, swap apprenticeships—something that upsets no one, and makes both girls happy. Martha and Lettie's ability to essentially thwart what's supposed to happen and pave their own ways suggests that destiny is more malleable than Sophie thinks. Indeed, it's implied that Sophie's curse making her old is so difficult to lift because Sophie believes so fully that she's just supposed to accept her fate. Put another way, it's Sophie's unwavering belief in her own future failure that renders her incapable of changing anything about her life. It's only when she accepts that she does have some control that the curse lifts, and Sophie realizes that she, too, has the right to make her own choices that lead to her happiness.

of the novel, she reconnects with her family and, when the curse lifts, is willing to admit that she's fallen in love with Howl—it's implied that they will get married after the novel ends, thereby formalizing their chosen family unit. And at the same time, Sophie breaks Calcifer and Howl's contract, freeing them from any formal obligation to each other—and yet, Calcifer decides to return to Howl's hearth, so long as he can come and go. This suggests that committing to someone willingly (rather than feeling obligated due to blood ties or a contract) is one of the most important elements in creating a strong and supportive family.



MAGIC AND COMING OF AGE

Over the course of *Howl's Moving Castle*, teenage Sophie comes of age. This process occurs for her as she slowly discovers her magical abilities and accepts that she is indeed capable of great things—if only she believes in herself. The novel suggests Sophie is magical early on when, during her apprenticeship in her stepmother Fanny's hat shop, Sophie begins talking to the hats she trims. Unknowingly, Sophie charms the hats when she tells them what kind of a lady should purchase and wear them. The evil Witch of the Waste then curses Sophie to become an old lady, thereby depriving Sophie of her youth and, in theory, of her ability to come of age. However, as an old woman, Sophie continues to “speak life into” things, such as her **walking stick**, a scarecrow, and even Wizard Howl's suits, and she finally accepts her magical abilities at the end of the novel. Accepting her own power also allows the curse to lift, returning Sophie to her teenage self—but her time as an old woman gives Sophie the perspective that the novel suggests only comes with age. Sophie is far more confident after spending a month as an elderly person, something that the novel implies prepares her for a lifelong romantic relationship with Howl after the novel's close.

Howl's coming of age is also tied to accepting magic—in his case, the Witch's curse on him. As the Witch's curse slowly comes true, Howl becomes increasingly honest and kind. Ultimately, he learns to commit to one woman (Sophie), rather than breaking heart after heart—a practice the novel characterizes as youthful selfishness. For both Howl and Sophie, their respective coming of age journeys are tied to their willingness to accept a new form of magic and believe in their ability to do difficult things.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



SOPHIE'S WALKING STICK

Sophie's walking stick represents Sophie's coming of age process, particularly as she develops self-confidence. When Sophie first finds her stick, she's recently been turned into an elderly woman and needs the stick for mobility reasons. The stick is, at this point, something that props Sophie up when she's weaker than usual—and when she's at a low spot emotionally as well, as she believes she's destined to fail due to being the eldest of three children. However, unbeknownst to Sophie, she has the power to “talk life” into things, and she talks life into her stick over the course of the novel. This eventually turns it into what Mrs. Pentstemmon says is some approximation of a magic wand: it's a magical, almost sentient thing in its own right. By this point in the novel, Sophie accepts that she's powerful and has the ability to talk life into things, such as her stick, which now symbolizes her growing self-confidence. During the novel's final battle between Sophie, Howl, and Miss Angorian, Sophie fully comes into her own and fully accepts her own power—and she discovers that she can be successful, if only she thinks about what she's doing. And when Howl causes the stick to vanish during the battle (and when Sophie then reverts to her teenage self), it symbolizes that Sophie has come of age and learned to accept that she's powerful, competent, and can stand on her own two feet, without a magic wand or a walking stick.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Greenwillow Books edition of *Howl's Moving Castle* published in 2008.

Chapter One Quotes

●● In the land of Ingary, where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist, it is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three. Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, Martha Hatter, Lettie Hatter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis


The novel's opening lines introduces readers to a belief that guides protagonist Sophie throughout the novel: that

because she's the first of three children, she's destined to fail. This passage highlights that this is a widespread societal belief in Ingary, which helps Sophie justify believing in it as well: she's not unusual, in other words, for expecting that she's going to fail due to being the oldest. It also sets up Sophie's eventual failure as a fact, something that's not worth arguing with. And this mindset leads Sophie to inaction throughout the novel, as she believes there's no use fighting against what destiny says is absolutely going to happen.

However, over the course of the novel, Sophie gets several indicators that she perhaps puts too much stock in this belief. Her sisters Martha and Lettie, for instance, switch apprenticeships so that ambitious (but doomed to be mediocre) Lettie can pursue a career in witchcraft. The youngest sister, Martha (who's destined to be successful), takes Lettie's food service apprenticeship so she's better positioned to get married and have babies—something the novel characterizes as not very ambitious. These two are ultimately successful in thwarting what destiny supposedly sets out for them, suggesting that the common belief that birth order actually matters to a person's success is incorrect. Rather, the novel overwhelmingly suggests that what will guarantee a person's failure is if that person believes they're going to fail.

☝ Sophie felt as if the past months of sitting and sewing had turned her into an old woman or a semi-invalid.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, The Witch of the Waste

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

When Sophie finally goes out to visit Lettie on May Day, she discovers that spending so much time inside over the last few months has made her feel very old: she's afraid of the crowds and doesn't find the celebrations in the streets exciting at all. What's important here is that Sophie is, at this point, still in her teenage body—and yet she already feels like an elderly woman. This implies that when the Witch of the Waste curses Sophie to be old, the Witch might choose to make Sophie old because Sophie is essentially already halfway there—or perhaps Sophie dictates the shape of the curse entirely. Either way, this also explains why it takes Sophie so long to be able to lift the curse. In this regard, as with Sophie's belief that it's her destiny to fail, it's Sophie's

personal beliefs that end up trapping her: she believes she'll fail, and she believes she makes a perfect old lady due to her fear and apprehension. To return herself to her teenage body and come of age, Sophie must realize she has the power to change how she thinks about herself and what she's capable of.

Chapter Two Quotes

☝ “I never knew!”

“Well, it wasn't much good going on about it when you were so busy backing Mother up about me making my fortune,” Martha said. “You thought Mother meant it. I did too, until Father died and I saw she was just trying to get rid of us—putting Lettie where she was bound to meet a lot of men and get married off, and sending me as far away as she could! I was so angry I thought, Why not? And I spoke to Lettie and she was just as angry and we fixed it up. We're fine now.”

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, Martha Hatter (speaker), Lettie Hatter, Fanny

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Sophie has gone to visit Lettie at her apprenticeship in Market Chipping—but she discovers that Martha and Lettie have used a spell to switch places, so she's actually speaking to Martha. Martha is explaining why she and Lettie switched places.

Essentially, Martha insists that because Sophie and Fanny have been so focused on telling Martha that she's destined to make her fortune, it took Martha a long time to realize that she doesn't *want* to make her fortune. In fact, she just wants to get married and have a family. Upon the girls' father's death, when Fanny got each daughter an apprenticeship, it became clear to Martha how caught up Fanny was in destiny: it never occurred to her to ask her daughters what they wanted. Instead, she found them apprenticeships based on what each girl's destiny was supposed to be. And Fanny and Sophie both allowed their belief in destiny and what's supposed to happen cloud their ability to see Martha and Lettie for who they really are—that is, that Martha isn't ambitious, while Lettie is. This highlights the novel's insistence that believing so fully in destiny (or really, anything) so fully that it blinds a person from seeing what's really in front of them can cause major damage. Martha is livid with her mother for “trying to get



rid of” her and Lettie in ways that Martha believes are offensive. And on some level, she’s angry with Sophie too. This is Sophie’s first indication that destiny isn’t set in stone (after all, Martha at least seems to be doing just fine in Lettie’s apprenticeship), and that believing in it too fully can have negative consequences.

Chapter Three Quotes

☞ Perhaps Howl kept him in abject servility. But Michael did not look servile. He was a tall, dark boy with a pleasant, open sort of face, and he was most respectably dressed. In fact, if Sophie had not seen him at that moment carefully pouring green fluid out of a crooked flask onto black powder in a bent glass jar, she would have taken him for the son of a prosperous farmer. How odd!

Still, things were bound to be odd where wizards were concerned, Sophie thought.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, Michael, Wizard Howl, Mrs. Fairfax, Martha Hatter

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Sophie has pushed her way into the moving castle and is sitting by the fire, watching Howl’s apprentice, Michael, work. She’s trying to figure out what Howl is like as an employer, and she’s realizing that her preconceptions about what Howl and Michael are like might be incorrect.

Sophie makes it clear throughout this passage that she expects Howl to be evil and Michael to be afraid and exploited. However, there’s little indication that either of these things is true: Howl isn’t here and so Sophie can’t observe him, but Michael seems happy to work, well-fed, and as though he’s being cared for. The only thing that marks him as a person who can do magic is, in fact, that he’s currently mixing up a spell with interesting-looking flasks and powders—he himself looks perfectly normal.



Despite Sophie’s surprise, it actually makes sense that Michael looks so normal. Witchcraft is, in Ingary, framed as a respectable profession—after all, Martha was initially sent to apprentice with the witch Mrs. Fairfax so that she’d have the best chance to make her fortune. So Sophie’s main prejudice, this shows, is against Howl: she believes he’s evil, not necessarily that witchcraft itself is horrible. Seeing that Michael doesn’t meet these expectations and is actually a

normal teenage boy offers hope that Sophie will continue to learn to think critically about her preconceptions and set them aside if it turns out they’re not useful.

☞ “I’m fastened to this hearth and I can’t stir so much as a foot away. I’m forced to do most of the magic around here. I have to maintain the castle and keep it moving and do all the special effects that scare people off, as well as anything else Howl wants. Howl’s quite heartless, you know.”

Sophie did not need telling that Howl was heartless. On the other hand, the demon was probably quite as wicked.

Related Characters: Calcifer (speaker), Sophie Hatter, Wizard Howl, Michael

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Sophie is speaking to Calcifer, the fire demon who powers Howl’s moving castle; Calcifer is explaining what he must do per his contract with Howl. While Sophie thought earlier that Howl’s human apprentice Michael was being exploited, Calcifer implies (and later goes on to say outright) that he’s actually the one being exploited. This is a new idea for Sophie, as she has specific ideas about what demons are and what they do—at this point, she seems to brush off Calcifer’s insistence that Howl is abusing Calcifer’s powers by telling herself that Calcifer is evil, so Howl’s behavior isn’t surprising.

What’s most telling about this passage, though, is that it offers readers and Sophie the first clue as to what Howl and Calcifer’s contract entails. Referring to Howl as “heartless” is true in the proverbial sense of the word; Howl is sometimes selfish and abuses others’ trust. But Howl is also *literally* heartless, as he gave Calcifer his heart as part of the contract. It makes sense why Sophie interprets Calcifer as saying that Howl is just cruel and selfish; after all, living things all have a heart of some sort to pump blood, so the idea that Howl lacks a physical heart never enters her mind. But her unwillingness to consider what else Calcifer might mean by this—especially as Calcifer goes on to describe Howl as heartless multiple times—shows how her preconceptions blind her to what could be true.

Chapter Five Quotes

☞ It was odd. As a girl, Sophie would have shriveled with embarrassment at the way she was behaving. As an old woman, she did not mind what she did or said. She found that a great relief.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, Michael, Wizard Howl

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis



Sophie has just annoyed and embarrassed Michael by telling a little girl in Porthaven that she's a witch; Michael fears Howl won't like this rumor getting out. This passage highlights how Sophie is starting to come into her own and stop taking herself so seriously, now that she's in an old woman's body. Essentially, getting to embody someone else—an elderly woman who isn't much concerned with what others think of her behavior—is freeing. Sophie can experiment, say things she'd never say in her teenage body, and see what behaving like this is all about. So, while the curse might have been intended to essentially rob Sophie of her ability to grow up and come of age, it's actually doing the opposite. It's giving Sophie chances to grow *down*, as it were, and to discover what it's like to be young and fearless—a quality Sophie never had when she looked like a young girl. That Sophie finds it such a relief to not have to worry so much about her behavior suggests that Sophie should, perhaps, stop caring so much when she does return to her teenage body—it's not serving her, and it's only making her feel old and constricted.

☞ “You’re a dreadfully nosy, horribly bossy, appallingly clean old woman. Control yourself. You’re victimizing us all.”

“But it’s a pigsty,” said Sophie. “I can’t help what I am!”

“Yes you can,” said Howl.

Related Characters: Wizard Howl, Sophie Hatter (speaker), Michael, Calcifer

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Howl turns Sophie away when she tries to clean his extremely dirty bedroom, insisting that she can indeed

change her priorities and figure out how to leave his bedroom alone. Sophie picks up mostly on Howl's insults: that she's nosy, unpleasant to be around, and that her desire to clean isn't appreciated in his castle. She remains set in her ways, insisting that the castle needs to be cleaned—it's not her fault she wants to clean it, the issue is that Howl isn't doing what he's supposed to do. This reflects how, more generally, Sophie tends to decide something is true and then stick with it. She's generally unwilling to change her mind about things, despite finding evidence that she's wrong.

However, Howl's words have a double meaning. When he tells Sophie that she can help what she is, it's possible to read this as him telling her not just that she can control her urge to clean and boss him around: she can also change her thinking that she's supposed to be an old woman right now. It later comes out that Howl knows pretty early on that Sophie is cursed to be old, though it's impossible to tell when exactly he figures this out. If he knows now that Sophie's belief in destiny and her own failure is keeping her old, then he may indeed be telling her that she can thwart destiny and find success if only she believes she can. But at this point, Sophie remains stuck in her belief systems—and will until the end of the novel.

Chapter Seven Quotes

☞ “And my heart—but you wouldn't understand, you silly young demon!” Sophie panted. “You haven't got a heart.”

“Yes I have,” Calcifer said, as proudly as he had revealed his arm.

“Down in the glowing part under the logs. And don't call me young. I'm a good million years older than you are!”

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, Calcifer (speaker), Wizard Howl

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

The scarecrow has just attempted to enter the moving castle, frightening Sophie and causing her heart to hurt. She's asking Calcifer to make the castle go faster to leave the scarecrow behind.

Once again, Sophie demonstrates her preconceptions when she insists that Calcifer is both young and without a literal heart. She has a specific idea about what demons are and how their bodies work, and it takes Calcifer stepping in and setting her straight to cause Sophie to change her mind.



What's most interesting about this exchange, however, is the way Calcifer talks about having a heart. Later, it's revealed that the heart isn't really Calcifer's: it's Howl's, and part of their contract dictates that Calcifer is kept alive because Howl gave up his heart to the fire demon. This explains why Calcifer is so proud of "his" heart: it's not something demons usually have, so in this regard, Sophie is right. But as is often the case, Sophie glosses over this exchange and misses that Calcifer just gave her a big clue as to the terms of his contract with Howl.

“Dear Sophie, do please tell me how you bully a fire demon into being that obliging. I'd dearly love to know!”

“I didn't bully him,” said Sophie. “It gave me a turn and he was sorry for me.”

“It gave her a turn and Calcifer was sorry for her,” Howl repeated. “My good Sophie, Calcifer is never sorry for anyone.”

Related Characters: Wizard Howl, Sophie Hatter (speaker), Calcifer

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis



When Howl gets home hours after the scarecrow frightened Sophie and Calcifer made the castle go faster to ease her fears, he's angry and insists Calcifer isn't nearly as compassionate as Sophie makes him out to be. That Howl sticks to his assumptions, rather than listening to Sophie, suggests that Howl and Sophie are much alike in this regard: they both make assumptions about other people or demons, and it takes a lot to get them to change their minds. But in this case, readers know that Sophie is telling the truth: she might not have used polite language to ask Calcifer to make the castle go faster, but she didn't bully him.

Additionally, it's remarkable how insistent Howl is that Calcifer isn't a nice being who, under certain circumstances, is willing to do a nice thing for someone he likes. He insists that Calcifer is exactly what Sophie initially thought Calcifer was: wholly evil. But Sophie's experiences with Calcifer have taught her that Calcifer is indeed a caring being, so it looks more and more like Howl is simply refusing to acknowledge that there's more to Calcifer than he expects.

Chapter Eight Quotes

“As if I wouldn't recognize one of my own honey-based spells! But as I said to her at the time, ‘I'm not one to keep anyone against their will and I'd always rather teach someone who wants to learn. Only,’ I said to her, ‘I'll have no pretense here. You stay as your own self or not at all.’ And it's worked out very happily, as you see.”

Related Characters: Mrs. Fairfax (speaker), Sophie Hatter, Martha Hatter, Lettie Hatter, Michael

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

Sophie and Michael are visiting Mrs. Fairfax, and Mrs. Fairfax is explaining why she's not at all upset to have Lettie as an apprentice rather than Martha, who was her original apprentice. Initially, Martha was Mrs. Fairfax's apprentice, as Fanny believed that a career in witchcraft was going to help Martha find her fortune (as the third-born, Martha is supposedly destined to be wildly successful). But Martha discovered she wasn't actually that ambitious, while middle sister Lettie is—so the two switched places, using one of Mrs. Fairfax's switching spells. Mrs. Fairfax's no-nonsense manner as she explains her thinking to Sophie does come as a bit of a shock to Sophie. Sophie believes fully in destiny, so it's already surprising to her that her sisters aren't doing what she expected them to do. So, it's even more surprising to hear that nobody else really cares whether Martha doesn't actually become extremely successful, or whether Lettie does instead: they care that the girls are happy and fulfilled. Essentially, Mrs. Fairfax impressed upon Lettie that she needs to do what's best for her, without apologizing or trying to hide what she actually wants. This is an important lesson for Sophie as well—and one that it takes Sophie the entire novel to learn for herself.



Chapter Nine Quotes

“He told me his troubles and dripped on me. Didn't you?” said Calcifer. “It didn't seem to occur to him that I might have troubles as well.”

“I don't think you have. You just grumble a lot,” Michael said. “You were quite nice to me that morning, and I think Howl was impressed. But you know how he is. He didn't tell me I could stay. He just didn't tell me to go.”

Related Characters: Calcifer, Michael (speaker), Sophie

Hatter, Wizard Howl

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

One afternoon, Michael explains to Sophie how he came to live with Howl and be Howl's apprentice. After his parents died, orphaning him, Howl took Michael in in his usual fashion: by being really vague and not telling Michael to get out. Calcifer is describing his and Michael's first conversation.

What's most interesting in this passage is the way that Michael's assessments of Howl and Calcifer differ so much. Calcifer makes it pretty clear that he does indeed have troubles—and yet, Michael continues to not take Calcifer seriously. Calcifer just “grumble[s],” a word that minimizes the fact that Calcifer indeed has some pretty real troubles (namely, his contract with Howl). But while Michael remains convinced that Calcifer is just whiny, he extends way more generosity to Howl. Before coming to Howl, Michael had heard that Howl's house (and possibly Howl himself) was evil. And yet, Michael was willing to look past that and seek Howl out. Howl then proved himself surprisingly kind by allowing Michael in and ultimately taking Michael on as an apprentice. This gives Michael a future that he otherwise wouldn't have, as an orphan. So, while Michael is willing to reconsider his preconceptions about Howl, he's unwilling to extend the same courtesy to Calcifer—which is, interestingly, almost the exact opposite of what Sophie does.

Explanation and Analysis

When Sophie is home alone in the moving castle one day, she takes over Michael and Howl's work dispensing spells in Kingsbury and Porthaven. First, Sophie and Calcifer's trusting relationship shines through here: Calcifer is the only other person home, but Sophie also trusts Calcifer to not lead her astray. Additionally, Sophie is taking over Michael and Howl's work as though she belongs at the castle. Sophie is, in this sense, becoming one of the family.

Then, as Calcifer explains to Sophie how the spell for this “young fellow” works, he suggests that lots of people follow or believe things just because they've been led to do so, not because they have much evidence that they should. The spell, Calcifer implies, won't really do much for the man's problem on its own; the man has to *believe* it'll work for the spell to be effective. This explicitly introduces the idea that in Ingary, a lot of magic works because people expect it to—which has huge implications for Sophie's curse. Indeed, the novel implies at various points that Sophie only stays cursed for so long because she believes she's supposed to be cursed, the implication being that if Sophie could change her thought process, she could become young again. But as this passage shows, belief can work for good and for bad: it can help this man deal with his horse problem, and it can keep Sophie trapped as an old woman.

Finally, this day is also a turning point in Sophie's magical education. She thinks she's just an imposter right now, but she discovers eventually that she is indeed a witch and can do magic—and here, she learns how to dispense it and gets a basic introduction to the various powders and spells Howl keeps. Her growing comfort with magic suggests that she's coming of age, as Sophie's maturity is tied to her willingness to accept that she herself is magical and powerful.

Chapter Ten Quotes

☝☝ There was a cart horse outside. The young fellow of fifty who was leading it wondered if Mrs. Witch had something which might stop it casting shoes all the time.

“I'll see,” said Sophie. She hobbled over to the grate. “What shall I *do*?” she whispered.

“Yellow powder, fourth jar along on the second shelf,” Calcifer whispered back. “Those spells are mostly belief. Don't look uncertain when you give it to him.”

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, Calcifer (speaker), Wizard Howl, Michael

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 189



Chapter Eleven Quotes

☝☝ “Are you trying to bring me down to your level? You had all that education, and you don't even get a decent job, you just hang around, wasting all that time at college, wasting all those sacrifices other people made, wasting your money...”

[...] Sophie began to understand how Howl had acquired the habit of slithering out. Megan was the kind of person who made you want to back quietly out of the nearest door. [...]

“... never doing an honest day's work, never getting a job I could be proud of, bringing shame on me and Gareth, coming here and spoiling Mari rotten,” Megan ground on remorselessly.

Related Characters: Megan Parry (speaker), Wizard Howl, Sophie Hatter, Michael, Mari Parry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

Howl has brought Sophie and Michael with him to Wales to call on his sister, Megan, and retrieve one of his books from her house. Megan has no problem telling Howl how disappointed she is in him—and it makes an impression on Sophie.


Generally speaking, this passage highlights how fraught Howl's relationship with his blood family is. The only person he seems to have a good relationship with is his young niece, Mari: Sophie earlier described their relationship as obviously "special." Megan, however, sees nothing good in her brother. Instead, she sees him as someone who selfishly takes and abuses other people's generosity. Some of this has to do with the fact that Megan, who lives in nonmagical Wales, has no idea that Howl is actually a very respected wizard in Ingary. He makes a good living for himself, can care for Michael, Sophie, and Calcifer, and is even good enough that the King wants to hire him. Howl can't tell Megan this, however, so he's unable to repair his relationship with his sister and show her that she's wrong. So, instead of finding support and fulfillment with his blood family, Howl must turn to his chosen family—those who live in his castle—instead.

Chapter Twelve Quotes

☝️ She had said Sophie was a witch. Oddly enough, Sophie accepted this without any trouble at all. That explained the popularity of certain hats, she thought. It explained Jane Farrier's Count Whatsit. It possibly explained the jealousy of the Witch of the Waste. It was as if Sophie had always known this. But she had thought it was not proper to have a magic gift because she was the eldest of three.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, Mrs. Pentstemmon, Jane Farrier, The Witch of the Waste

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 238-239

Explanation and Analysis

During Sophie and Mrs. Pentstemmon's conversation, Mrs. Pentstemmon observes that Sophie is a witch, and that her

walking stick is a sort of magic wand. As she considers this, Sophie finds herself caught between two ways of thinking. On the one hand, Sophie has sensed for some time that she has magical powers: the hat shop in Market Chipping took off once Sophie started trimming hats and unwittingly charming them and their eventual wearers. One of Sophie's charmed hats even resulted in a plain local girl, Jane Farrier, running off with a count—and, of course, there's the fact that the Witch of the Waste took an interest in Sophie and insisted that Sophie was competition. The evidence is all there: Sophie is a witch.

However, on the other hand, Sophie never expected to be capable of performing magic. As the eldest of three, she's destined to fail, so it doesn't make sense to her why she'd have such a gift. So, essentially, Sophie begins to realize that she needs to rethink her closely held beliefs and look at the evidence in front of her before making decisions or judgments. Not all of her beliefs and preconceptions are helping her, and in fact, they're obstacles.

Chapter Thirteen Quotes

☝️ True, he sat with one leg thrust out in a kingly sort of manner, and he was handsome in a plump, slightly vague way, but to Sophie he seemed quite youthful and just a touch too proud of being a king. She felt he ought, with that face, to have been more unsure of himself.

[...]

And Sophie was suddenly overwhelmed by the fact that she was standing talking to the King. It was, she thought dizzily, as if the man sitting there and the huge, important thing which was kingship were two separate things that just happened to occupy the same chair. And she found that she had forgotten every word of the careful, delicate things Howl had told her to say.

Related Characters: The King, Sophie Hatter, Wizard Howl

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 242-243

Explanation and Analysis

When Sophie shows up for her audience with the King, she's shocked: he looks like a perfectly normal person, but one who just so happens to be in charge of Ingary. Once again, Sophie finds that her preconceived notions don't serve her. She's never met the King before, and her reaction to his plain features suggests she expected to find someone grander, more handsome, and more imposing. Further, it's a

shock to realize that it's a normal person who's in charge of running everything in Ingary. Put another way, the King isn't anyone special; he's just a normal person, but one who has a lot of power. Essentially, what's in front of her doesn't match up with what she expected to see—and this causes her to forget everything that Howl instructed her to say.

That Sophie forgets highlights how unhelpful her judgments can be: now, she's not able to complete the one task she was sent here to do (badmouth Howl so the King won't appoint him Royal Magician).

Chapter Seventeen Quotes

☝ “I was terrified of him. I was terrified anyway, because when you fall you know you're going to die. I'd have done anything rather than die. When Howl offered to keep me alive the way humans stay alive, I suggested a contract on the spot. Neither of us knew what we were getting into. I was grateful, and Howl only offered because he was sorry for me.”

“Just like Michael,” said Sophie.

Related Characters: Calcifer, Sophie Hatter (speaker), Wizard Howl, Michael

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 322-323

Explanation and Analysis

Sophie has just figured out that Calcifer was once a falling star, and Calcifer is explaining how he fell to Earth and how he and Howl settled on their current contract. Calcifer makes it clear that when he and Howl struck their bargain, they were both young, naïve, and motivated by strong emotions. While Howl was motivated by pity and compassion, Calcifer was motivated by fear and his desire to keep living. It all seemed to fit together perfectly, so the contract initially looked like a grand idea. But that perception, Calcifer insists, is just youthful naivete: it's not helping either of them, now that they're older and now that Howl, at least, is getting ready to finally come of age. Indeed, Howl is being kept in what the novel portrays as a youthful state because giving his heart to Calcifer means that he's not able to commit to one woman romantically, as through marriage. That, per the novel's logic, would represent maturity for Howl, but because of the contract, Howl cannot move forward.

Additionally, Sophie continues to gather more information that suggests Howl isn't a terrible person. He is, in fact,

compassionate and goes out of his way to help people (and demons) he feels sorry for, just as he did with Michael. Though it takes Sophie a while to truly believe and voice that Howl is a nice person, it's significant that she verbally puts this together here: she's becoming more comfortable changing her views based on new information.

☝ Sophie looked up beyond the brick walls of Howl's yard to her own old house. It looked rather odd because of the new window in it that belonged to Howl's bedroom, and it made Sophie feel odder still when she realized that Howl's window did not look out onto the things she saw now. She could see the window of her own old bedroom, up above the shop. That made her feel odd too, because there did not seem to be any way to get up into it now.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, Wizard Howl

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

Howl is showing Sophie around the castle's new physical location, which is actually Sophie's childhood home and her family's old hat shop. It's not entirely clear whether Howl realizes that this is Sophie's childhood home (it's implied that he knows a lot about Sophie that he doesn't share until much later), but Sophie believes he doesn't know the significance of this place. This makes Sophie feel even more alone as she experiences some difficult, conflicting emotions.

Essentially, Sophie finds that in many ways, she's come of age and outgrown her childhood home as it once was. She cannot access her childhood bedroom, though she can see it; symbolically, this suggests that Sophie is still pretty close to her younger self, but she can't get back to that girl anymore. She's growing up. That Howl is also now living in Sophie's childhood home complicates things, too. Sophie and Howl eventually admit that they love each other and plan to marry after the novel's close, but at this point, having him in her longtime house feels uncomfortable to Sophie. He doesn't yet feel like part of the family, though he will one day be part of the family.

Additionally, Sophie notes again that Howl also feels deep love for his blood family, just as Sophie does. This is why Howl's bedroom window doesn't look out to where Sophie is right now; it looks out into his sister's backyard in Wales so that he can feel close to his family. Both Sophie and Howl,

then, currently have difficult relationships with their blood families—though Sophie’s ultimately resolves and returns to normal, while Howl’s doesn’t.

Chapter Eighteen Quotes

☞ “And don’t you dare tell Howl she was here!” she said unreasonably to Calcifer. “I bet she came to see Howl. The rest was just a pack of lies. Wizard Suliman was *settled* here, years ago. He probably came to get away from her beastly throbbing voice!”

Calcifer chuckled. “I’ve never seen anyone got rid of so fast!” he said.

This made Sophie feel both unkind and guilty. After all, she herself had walked into the castle in much the same way, and she had been twice as nosy as Miss Angorian.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, Calcifer (speaker), Miss Angorian, Wizard Howl, Wizard Suliman/Benjamin Sullivan

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 349

Explanation and Analysis

Sophie has just rudely shown Miss Angorian out the door back into Wales, and she’s very upset that the woman visited. Though Sophie isn’t willing to admit it, this is because Sophie herself is in love with Howl—and she believes that Howl is currently in love with Miss Angorian. But once again, Sophie only looks at some evidence while ignoring other things. She is, in fact, correct that Miss Angorian is lying about Ben Sullivan: Miss Angorian is the Witch of the Waste’s fire demon, not a real person, and so anything she says about her love life is probably a lie. However, rather than think more critically about what Miss Angorian’s visit means, Sophie instead tells herself what she wants to hear—that Miss Angorian is a terrible, unattractive person who frightens men away—to make herself feel better.

Calcifer seems to pick up on what’s actually going on when he observes how quickly Sophie got rid of their visitor. Indeed, it seems likely that Calcifer does convey how jealous Sophie is to Howl, as Howl later makes plans specifically expecting Sophie to be extremely jealous of Miss Angorian. However, Calcifer’s observation ends up having the opposite effect: Sophie vows to be nicer to Miss Angorian going forward, as she believes she herself isn’t worthy of Howl and should express her love instead by letting Howl date who he wants.

Chapter Nineteen Quotes

☞ “Sophie,” he said, “What do you mean by not telling me about this? This dog is a man! And he’s in a terrible state!”

[...]

“You could have noticed for yourself,” she said, glaring back, daring Howl to do his worst with green slime. “Anyway, the dog didn’t want—”

Howl was too angry to listen. He jumped up and hauled the dog across the tiles. “And so I would have done, if I hadn’t had things on my mind,” he said.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter, Wizard Howl (speaker), The Dog-Man/Percival

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 353-354

Explanation and Analysis


Sophie has been angry for a while, and it’s coming to a head. She’s just revealed to Howl that the dog-man is a cursed man, not an actual dog—and Howl is enraged to discover that Sophie kept this from him. First, it’s important to note the reason why Howl is so angry: he feels compassion for the dog-man and how awful it is to be cursed. Put simply, he feels bad for the dog-man and wants to return the dog-man to his human form so the dog-man is less miserable. This is yet more evidence for Sophie that Howl isn’t an awful, cruel person.

Sophie, though, doubles down and points out Howl’s faults. Specifically, she takes issue with how Howl’s selfishness and self-absorption kept him from seeing that the dog-man isn’t a real dog, something she suggests should be obvious to a wizard such as Howl. Interestingly, Howl essentially concedes that Sophie is correct: he’s been distracted since he got sick and since Mrs. Pentstemmon died, and this has clouded his judgment and perception. Still, he implies that he expects the people closest to him, like Sophie, Michael, and Calcifer, to fill in these blind spots—something that Sophie continues to take issue with through the rest of this chapter.

☞ But she could not deny that something had been wrong ever since the moving castle moved, or even before that. And it seemed to tie up with the way Sophie seemed so mysteriously unable to face either of her sisters.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter (speaker), Martha

Hatter, Lettie Hatter

Related Themes: 


Page Number: 364

Explanation and Analysis

Sophie is out killing weeds, grumbling to herself about what she thinks is making her so angry—but she’s unwilling to voice this thought, that whatever’s wrong is connected to her unwillingness to speak to Martha or Lettie. Put simply, the novel implies that a lot of Sophie’s angst is related to suddenly feeling cut off from her blood family. Prior to Martha and Lettie leaving home for their apprenticeships, Sophie had close relationships with them. But since they left, they haven’t spoken much. Indeed, Sophie’s transformation from a perfectly normal young woman into one who felt afraid of everything and like an old lady coincided with her sisters’ departures, highlighting how much Sophie’s sense of self depends on having her family nearby. Now, in her current form as an old woman, Sophie realizes on some level that things aren’t going to improve until she reaches out to her sisters, but she doesn’t know how to do this, or what to say. So for now, until she figures out what to do, she’s stuck feeling miserable and angry at everything.

“What’s wrong with it?” said Percival. “Why didn’t you want it?”

Related Characters: The Dog-Man/Percival (speaker), Sophie Hatter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 366

Explanation and Analysis

While Sophie is out killing weeds with Percival, the scarecrow appears. Sophie uses her magic to send the scarecrow away, but Percival, confused, asks why Sophie wants to get rid of it in the first place. This is a fair question, and it’s one that Sophie hasn’t asked herself before. Indeed, she later decides that the scarecrow isn’t frightening at all, and that she simply decided to be afraid of the scarecrow to give herself an excuse to not leave the moving castle. So, Percival’s question mostly functions to show that Sophie isn’t asking these questions herself—and not asking the questions keeps Sophie from getting the information she

needs to make informed decisions.

Whether the scarecrow is good or evil becomes a big question later, so it’s significant that Percival—a character who’s aligned with good—interprets the scarecrow as being harmless, or even good. He essentially confirms that Sophie has nothing to fear. But because Sophie is so intent on not questioning her worldview, she’s unwilling to listen to Percival and consider whether she may be misjudging the scarecrow.

“But do you honestly think I don’t know my own business well enough to spot a strong spell like that when I see it? I had several goes at taking it off you when you weren’t looking. But nothing seems to work. I took you to Mrs. Pentstemmon, hoping she could do something, but she evidently couldn’t. I came to the conclusion that you liked being in disguise.”

“Disguise!” Sophie yelled.

Howl laughed at her. “It must be, since you’re doing it yourself,” he said.

Related Characters: Wizard Howl, Sophie Hatter (speaker), Mrs. Pentstemmon

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 353-354

Explanation and Analysis

Sophie is still angry, and her rage is growing stronger as Howl reveals that he’s known for some time that she’s cursed to be old. Sophie sees this as a huge betrayal; it makes her feel vulnerable. This is in part because, as an old lady, Sophie has been able to experiment with acting in ways she wouldn’t normally. As an old lady, Sophie has been nosy, assertive, funny, and confident—all things she wasn’t when she looked her age. Part of Sophie’s vulnerability comes from learning that she wasn’t actually fooling anyone: people know who she is, and now they’ve seen her act in ways they wouldn’t normally expect her to act. And when it comes to Howl, this becomes even more complicated since Sophie has a crush on him but isn’t entirely willing to admit it yet.

Then, Howl reveals that Sophie is still cursed, mostly because Sophie herself is keeping the curse intact. Nobody, not even a prominent magical person like Mrs. Pentstemmon, has been able to lift it—and the only explanation for this, Howl believes, is that Sophie is unwittingly fighting them. This makes sense, given that Sophie has said time and again that she feels like an old

lady—there’s some comfort in being old and, for instance, being “too old” to admit her feelings for Howl and then do something about them. More broadly, though, it suggests that Sophie is more powerful than she thinks. Just as she’s now keeping herself trapped, she could, presumably, change her thinking and free herself from the curse.

Chapter Twenty Quotes

☞ “Do listen. He’s not wicked at all!” There was a bit of a fizz from the grate at this, where Calcifer was watching with some interest. “He isn’t!” Sophie said, to Calcifer as much as to Fanny. “In all the time I’ve been here, I’ve not seen him work a single evil spell!” Which again was true, she knew.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter (speaker), Calcifer , Fanny, Wizard Howl

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 382

Explanation and Analysis

Fanny has just arrived at the moving castle, and to Sophie’s surprise, Fanny recognizes her. Sophie is now explaining how Howl has helped her and making it clear that despite the rumors suggesting otherwise, Howl isn’t evil. This is a hugely significant moment for Sophie, as this is the first time that Sophie is willing to admit that Howl isn’t a bad person. And in fact, though she doesn’t acknowledge it here, she has lots of evidence that Howl is extremely kind: he took her in, for instance, and he saved both Michael and Calcifer from potentially horrible fates. It’s telling that Sophie is only able to voice this once she’s reunited with Fanny, a woman she loves and trusts. It speaks to how important Sophie’s family is to her sense of self: Sophie is only really able to speak what she knows is the truth when she knows she has familial support.

Hearing Sophie say that Howl isn’t bad is something of a shock for Calcifer, as he and Sophie have bonded in part because they both find Howl vain and annoying. And Sophie has been vocal about thinking Howl is evil for some time now, so Calcifer’s fizzing is a further signal that this admission is a big deal for Sophie.

Chapter Twenty-One Quotes

☞ Sophie raised her stick, slowly and gently. This time she thought for an instant before she acted. “Stick,” she muttered. “Beat Miss Angorian, but don’t hurt anyone else.” Then she swung the stick and hit Miss Angorian’s tight knuckles the biggest crack she could.

Miss Angorian let out a squealing hiss like a wet log burning and dropped Calcifer. Poor Calcifer rolled helplessly on the floor, flaming sideways across the flagstones and roaring huskily with terror. Miss Angorian raised a foot to stamp on him. Sophie had to let go of her stick and dive to rescue Calcifer. Her stick, to her surprise, hit Miss Angorian again on its own, and again, and again. But of course it would! Sophie thought. She had talked life into that stick.

Related Characters: Sophie Hatter (speaker), Miss Angorian, Calcifer , Wizard Howl

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 419



Explanation and Analysis


During the final showdown with Miss Angorian, Sophie rescues Calcifer (who’s attached to Howl’s heart) from Miss Angorian. To do so, she takes Howl’s advice to stop believing that she fails at things because she’s destined to—rather, Howl suggested earlier, Sophie fails because she doesn’t think before she acts. As she takes Howl’s advice here and emerges successful, she realizes that he’s right: destiny doesn’t have to dictate the course of her life. She can take just a moment to study a situation, make a choice that will help her, and by doing so, she can create a life for herself that makes her happy—and beat evil people like Miss Angorian.

That the stick continues to beat Miss Angorian after Sophie lets go of it symbolizes where Sophie is in her coming-of-age journey. Right now, she’s discovering that she is capable and competent. Because she now believes this, she’s able to let go of her proverbial crutch and operate on her own as an independent adult. For now, Sophie’s stick is still a useful tool—but she doesn’t need it for much longer, as she’s almost come of age.

●● He stood up in a hurry. He held out one hand and spoke a sentence of those words that lost themselves in claps of thunder. Plaster fell from the ceiling. Everything trembled. But the stick vanished and Howl stepped back with a small, hard, black thing in his hand.

Related Characters: Wizard Howl, Sophie Hatter, Miss Angorian, Calcifer, The Witch of the Waste

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 424

Explanation and Analysis

Sophie has just put Howl's heart back in his body; now, he's standing up to rescue everyone else in the moving castle from Sophie's flaming walking stick, which is supposed to be hitting Miss Angorian. Miss Angorian, however, is trying to burn people and the castle with it.

Howl's spell causes him to take control of the Witch of the Waste's heart; it's the "small, hard, black thing" he's holding at the end of this passage. With it, Howl is assured victory over the Witch of the Waste and her fire demon. And with this victory, Howl also thwarts destiny and doesn't fall victim to the Witch of the Waste's spell—showing again that destiny doesn't guide everything in Ingary. People can fight back and create lives for themselves, rather than simply going along with what's supposed to happen.

It's also significant that in this scene, Sophie's walking stick disappears. This symbolizes that she's no longer dependent on the stick: she knows she's capable, magical, and can do things without either a mobility aid or an object through which to channel her magic. Sophie has, in this sense, come of age.

●● "I said," Michael shouted, "that *Calcifer's come back!*"

That did get Howl's attention, and Sophie's too. They looked at the grate where, sure enough, the familiar blue face was flickering among the logs.

"You didn't need to do that," Howl said.

"I don't mind, as long as I can come and go," Calcifer said. "Besides, it's raining out in Market Chipping."

Related Characters: Michael, Wizard Howl, Calcifer (speaker), Sophie Hatter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 424

Explanation and Analysis

Sophie broke Howl and Calcifer's contract a few minutes ago, and initially, Calcifer left the moving castle. But now he's back, ostensibly because it's raining outside and the rain might put him out. However, both Howl and Calcifer acknowledge that something huge has changed in their relationship: they no longer have the contract binding them to each other, so for the first time, Calcifer has a choice in where he lives, what he does, and who he serves. Howl shows again that he is a good person by insisting to Calcifer that he in no way expects the fire demon to continue living in the moving castle, where he's been imprisoned for the last five years. But Calcifer implies that he and Howl have built a strong relationship over those five years—and this means that Calcifer feels like one of the family. But it's very different *choosing* to be a part of the family, rather than being forced to stick around because of the contract. Indeed, Calcifer suggests that it's healthier and will make him happier to have the freedom to come and go as he pleases, while still getting to be a part of Sophie, Howl, and Michael's lives.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER ONE

The land of Ingary is a place where invisibility cloaks and seven-league boots exist. There, it's also considered bad luck to be the oldest child of three: the first child will fail, and fail spectacularly. Sophie Hatter isn't just the eldest of three; her parents are also well-off (poor eldest kids have a better chance of success) and own a hat shop in Market Chipping. Sophie's mother dies when Sophie is two and her younger sister Lettie is one. Their father marries a shop assistant named Fanny, who soon has the third daughter, Martha. Fanny, rather than shunning Sophie and Lettie, treats all the girls kindly. But still, Sophie soon realizes she has no chance of "an interesting future."

Sophie, however, isn't unhappy, as she enjoys being in charge of raising her sisters and breaking up their fights (Lettie always insists that, despite being the second-born, she'll marry a prince). Sophie regularly has to mend the rips in her sisters' clothes after these fights, and she's very skilled with needle and thread. About the time Sophie makes Lettie a gorgeous rose outfit for May Day, people start talking about the Witch of the Waste for the first time in decades. She apparently threatened the King's daughter, so the King sent Wizard Suliman, his personal magician, to go to the Waste to deal with the Witch—and Suliman died.

Months later, a tall, black, smoking castle appears on the hills above Market Chipping. People are terrified that the Witch will start terrorizing them like she used to, especially when they realize that the castle constantly moves. Soon, people discover that the castle belongs to Wizard Howl—which is still bad. Wizard Howl entertains himself by sucking the souls out of young girls or eating their hearts. All the girls in Market Chipping are warned to never go out alone. Sophie, Lettie, and Martha wonder often what Wizard Howl does with girls' hearts or souls—until the day their father dies suddenly. It turns out that his hat shop is deeply in debt, as he prioritized paying his daughters' tuition.

The novel opens by establishing that Ingary is a magical place where people can thwart normal rules, such as how fast someone can go and what one looks like. (Sophie's family even seems to deny another fairytale convention when her stepmother, Fanny, is kind rather than evil.) However, Ingary isn't without its own conventions, such as the belief that the eldest child of three is destined to fail. Sophie just accepts this as fact, which shows that she thinks of herself as being powerless to change things.



Instead of trying to change things, Sophie essentially just makes do with what she's been given in life. She seems close to her sisters, and this may make caring for them more fulfilling for Sophie than it might be otherwise. Still, Sophie and her sisters are very different: Lettie, at least, seems unwilling to accept that she's not destined for greatness. The Witch of the Waste's entry into the story creates drama and intrigue, though for now, her conflict with the King and his court seems very straightforward.



Wizard Howl reads as a terrifying figure—however, Ingary is a land where not everything is as it seems, so Howl's true nature may be different. Initially, it seems like Sophie and her sisters are thinking more critically about what Wizard Howl might be after. However, this stops immediately when their father dies and they're forced to deal with difficult, practical family matters. Even their father, they discover, wasn't what he seemed: despite seeming reasonably successful in life, it comes out that he mismanaged his finances.



After the funeral, Fanny sits down with Sophie, Lettie, and Martha. She explains that the only way to stay afloat is to get each girl an apprenticeship. Lettie, she says, will go work at the pastry cook Cesari's in Market Square. Lettie clearly isn't pleased, but she doesn't throw a fuss. Next, Fanny turns to Martha. Fanny says that Martha is going to be apprenticed to Mrs. Annabel Fairfax, an old friend who's a successful witch and who can help Martha be just as successful. Sophie thinks Fanny's choices seem very sensible: Lettie can marry and live a mediocre life, while Martha can flourish. Sophie isn't surprised when Fanny then says that Sophie will inherit the hat shop, so she'll be Fanny's apprentice.

Sophie helps Martha pack the next morning. Lettie refuses help and seems happy to leave the hat shop for the bakery. Over the next week, the girls send notes to Sophie, saying that they're both happy. Sophie doesn't hear much from her sisters for months after this, as she begins her own apprenticeship. Having grown up in the hat shop, Sophie already knows the trade, the employees, the suppliers, and the customers. All she really has to learn is how to sell hats. But Fanny doesn't let Sophie sell much, as she makes Sophie trim hats instead. Sophie is good at trimming hats and she likes it, but it's dull work and she's isolated in a little alcove. The one bright spot is that Sophie gets to listen to customers gossip about Wizard Howl, the Witch of the Waste, and the unattractive local girl Jane Farrier.

After a month, Sophie hears gossip about Lettie: Lettie is drawing gentleman customers to Cesari's, where they buy lots of cakes and ask to marry her. To the bonnet she's working on, Sophie says Lettie sounds very sensible for telling the boys she's not old enough to marry. As the weeks pass, Sophie talks more often to the hats. Eventually, Sophie finishes each hat by putting it on a stand and telling it what kind of a lady should wear it. For instance, Sophie tells one plain pleated bonnet that it has a pure heart and will attract someone powerful to fall in love with its wearer. (She feels sorry for the fussy bonnet.) Jane Farrier buys the bonnet, to Sophie's surprise.

Fanny reads as an extremely practical and caring woman. She wants her daughters to have the best chance to find success. And like Sophie, she believes fully in the idea that each girl's birth order will dictate how successful each girl will be. Again, though, Lettie's obvious displeasure at being apprenticed in a bakery shows that not all the Hatters are interested in just accepting the hand they're dealt. Additionally, apprenticing Martha to a witch suggests that magic and witchcraft aren't evil in Ingary—it's just Howl who's seen as evil.



The problem, Sophie discovers, is that she's already mostly prepared to run the hat shop in full—but what she's best at is trimming hats, and this job is about as boring as it gets. Prior to this it seemed like Sophie had fulfilling relationships with her sisters, but now she's isolated. Note too that Sophie expresses no interest in trying to advocate for herself or change anything about her apprenticeship. Fanny seems kind enough to want to make Sophie happy—but perhaps because Sophie feels so strongly about just accepting her lot in life, she never asks for help in improving her situation.



As Sophie grows increasingly lonelier, she turns to the only things she has to keep her company: the hats. The hats, of course, aren't great conversationalists, but talking to the hats gives Sophie a chance to dream and think about what life might be like beyond her little alcove. She also shows the hats a great deal of sympathy, as when she tells the bonnet it will do great things when there's no reason to expect that. Indeed, it seems doomed to fail when unattractive Jane purchases it.



Business is picking up, and Fanny almost regrets sending Martha and Lettie away. Sophie spends her nights trimming hats in the house just to keep up. There's a sudden demand for bonnets like the one Jane Farrier bought when Jane runs off with the Count of Catterack. Sophie stops talking to the hats and starts trying them on—a mistake, as none of them suit her. She wants a more interesting life, but Sophie believes she's far too busy to change anything, or even to go visit Lettie. Her inability to do anything begins to disturb her, so she swears to go visit Lettie when the hat shop is closed on May Day.

Gossip begins to circulate that the King fought with his brother, Prince Justin, and that Justin is in exile. Justin even came through Market Chipping in disguise, and the Count of Catterack was supposed to be looking for Justin when he ran off with Jane Farrier. This gossip makes Sophie even sadder—interesting things happen, just not to her. So she vows to go out when May Day rolls around. Before she leaves, Sophie trims a few more hats, reasoning that Lettie is working today so there's no hurry. But when Sophie finally goes out, she's in shock. The crowds are loud and overwhelming, and Sophie feels like working on hats for months has turned her into an old lady. Especially when Wizard Howl's castle appears near the town and shoots flames out of its turrets, she's terrified.

As Sophie runs, she tells herself she doesn't actually want life to be interesting—this is what happens to the eldest of three. In Market Square, a man in his 20s, fantastically dressed in a blue and silver suit with scalloped, trailing sleeves, offers to buy Sophie a drink. Sophie shrinks away, declines his offer, and then runs off. Finally, she reaches Cesari's, where the crowds are just as bad inside as they are outside. Lettie is behind the counter bagging cakes while a gaggle of admirers crowds the counter. When she catches sight of Sophie, she screams for Sophie to come behind the counter to a room lined in racks of cakes. Lettie pulls out stools, hands Sophie a cream cake, and then says she's not Lettie. She's Martha.

Interestingly, Sophie expresses no curiosity about what Jane Farrier might have had going for her to attract a count's attention, or about why business is picking up. Readers already know that Ingary is a magical place, so it seems possible that Sophie herself might be imbuing the hats with magic—but because Sophie believes she's destined to fail, this never occurs to her. Further, she's feeling more and more stuck in her unfulfilling life, and she justifies this by insisting it's just what it is. However, the fact that she's upset that she can't do anything offers hope that Sophie will be able to change her situation for the better.



Sophie continues to act resigned to her fate: of course, she reasons, nothing interesting happens to her, since she's the eldest of three. Readers, however, have no way of knowing where Prince Justin, Jane, and the Count of Catterack fall in their families' birth orders—they may be first or second children, suggesting that Sophie could be overly invested in her belief that nothing interesting can happen to her. Once she leaves the hat shop, Sophie learns that there are huge consequences for letting herself stay shut away: she can no longer enjoy the crowds or the celebrations.



Sophie's anxiety and fear is palpable—now, she's too afraid to seemingly even consider accepting this young man's offer to buy her a drink. However, Sophie seems to feel somewhat better inside Cesari's and close to Lettie (or Martha), suggesting that she draws strength from her family members. It's a shock, though, to discover that this is Lettie, not Martha. This forces Sophie to consider whether she misjudged her sisters, or failed to see them for who they really are.



CHAPTER TWO

Sophie is shocked, but she soon sees that the girl in front of her is indeed Martha, not Lettie. Swearing Sophie to secrecy, Martha explains that since Lettie wanted to learn witchcraft, she and Lettie decided to switch places rather than fight with Fanny. Fanny, Martha insists, is jealous of Lettie. Martha continues that it took her two weeks with Mrs. Fairfax to find the spell they're using, and then she came home to visit and she and Lettie switched places. When Sophie asks why Martha agreed to switch, Martha says she just wants to get married and have 10 kids. Now she has time to see if her future husband likes her for who she is (the spell will wear off gradually).

When Sophie exclaims she never knew Martha wanted to have so many children, Martha insists Sophie and Fanny were both too caught up in pushing Martha to make her fortune. It only became clear to her how manipulative Fanny is once she and Lettie got out—and now, she and Lettie are happy, but they feel bad for Sophie. Sophie fidgets uncomfortably as Martha says she's sure Fanny isn't paying Sophie. Instead, Fanny is just exploiting Sophie's skill at sewing and trimming hats while she's off buying new clothes and checking out mansions to buy with all the money Sophie is bringing in. Sophie suggests Fanny deserves some fun after working hard for so long, but a boy appears and tells Martha that new cakes are ready. Martha and Sophie haul a rack into the main shop, and then Martha is called back to work.

Sophie hurries home, feeling older and frailer than ever. Over the next week she realizes she severely misjudged her sisters, but she's not sure Martha is right about Fanny. Just over a week after May Day, Sophie works up the courage to ask for a wage—but as days pass, nothing changes and Sophie suspects Martha was right. Sophie wonders aloud to the hats if she's being exploited, and she considers leaving. But she remembers that there's no point, since she's the eldest. She's so annoyed that the next morning, when a young woman bursts into the shop with a mushroom bonnet and shrieks that the bonnet didn't do for her what a similar bonnet did for Jane Farrier, Sophie snaps that this is because the bonnet is an awful shape for the woman's face. The woman throws the bonnet at Sophie and leaves.

Recall that as the third-born, Martha is destined for greatness. But really, she's not that ambitious and just wants to have a family, and she's happy to support Lettie in her quest to seek her fortune. In particular, though, it's interesting to note how shocked Sophie is that Martha did this and has done so successfully. This highlights how fully Sophie buys into destiny being the law of the land. It seems to have never occurred to her that she could make different choices, ones that might help her achieve her dreams.



As Martha sees it, destiny isn't set in stone. And really, all it does is make her family members blind to who she really is and what she wants out of life. Then, Martha goes on to suggest that Sophie is a victim of Fanny's beliefs in destiny, too: Fanny, Martha implies, sees no reason to do anything more for Sophie than the bare minimum, hence making her work for no wage. As far as Sophie can tell, this simply reflects Martha's youth and her anger at how her mother has treated her. Sophie, who's several years older than Martha, believes that she's just more empathetic and understanding than her little sister.



Even when it starts to look like Martha might have had a point, Sophie remains paralyzed by her belief that she's destined to fail and live a boring life. Sophie believes that it's actually destiny that's keeping her from leaving the hat shop. But Martha and Lettie have seemingly thwarted what destiny insisted they'd do, so Sophie might just be keeping herself stuck in the hat shop. And when Sophie snaps at this customer, it suggests that she might not be able to keep this up for much longer. She's becoming increasingly annoyed with her situation, and soon, something is going to have to change.



Sophie is worried, as losing her temper at the customer was fun. But she doesn't have time to recover before a grand lady steps into the shop. Her hat has a real ostrich plume on it. A plain, nervous-looking man with red hair follows her in, looking horrified. The woman asks Sophie to show her the hats and Sophie complies, though she knows her hats aren't fancy enough for this woman. Sophie pulls out hat after hat. The woman rejects them all, and Sophie finally asks what the woman wants—this is just a small-town hat shop. The man behind the woman is signaling wildly. Imperiously, the woman says she always steps in when someone challenges the Witch of the Waste, and she doesn't like Sophie giving her competition. She throws her hand out like she's tossing something at Sophie's face.

Shaking, Sophie confirms that the lady is indeed the Witch of the Waste. She says there must be a mistake, as she's doing nothing to compete with the Witch. But the Witch turns to leave and tells Sophie that she won't be able to tell anyone outright that she's under a spell. Curious, Sophie puts her hands to her face—which is wrinkly. Her hands are knobby. Running to a mirror, Sophie looks into a gaunt, 90-year-old woman's face. Calmly, Sophie tells her reflection that this persona fits better anyway. She decides that she'll get back at the Witch eventually, but now she has to leave so Fanny doesn't get upset. As Sophie gathers bread and cheese, she discovers she's just stiff and old, not ill. Then, taking a few coins, she leaves her house.

As Sophie shuffles toward the edge of town, she decides to write to Lettie and Martha later. She reaches the country lanes and enjoys the warm day. Sophie keeps an eye out for a walking stick and thinks she finds one—but it's just an abandoned scarecrow with a turnip as a face. Setting it upright, Sophie speaks kindly to the scarecrow and wishes it luck. An hour later, Sophie sits to rest and hears squeaking in a hedge. Inside is a thin dog with a rope wound around its neck. The rope is tied to a **stick**, which is caught in the hedge. Sophie carefully cuts the rope and offers the dog cheese. It's too afraid and runs away, but the stick it was tied to is a real walking stick with an iron tip. As she continues on, Sophie begins to speak to it.

This woman—who turns out to be the Witch of the Waste—distracts Sophie from her conundrum. Suddenly, she realizes that she has to focus on trying to appease the Witch, rather than trying to survive her day to day. It's worth noting, though, that having the Witch of the Waste waltz into the hat shop means that arguably, interesting things can happen to Sophie, regardless of her being the eldest of three. The Witch saying she dislikes competition is interesting, as Sophie doesn't believe she's magical or has anything to do with the Witch. This suggests that Sophie has indeed been charming hats, though it's impossible to confirm this for now.



Sophie remains unwilling to consider that she has perhaps been performing magic. Calmly accepting that she's now a 90-year-old woman highlights how powerless Sophie feels when it comes to destiny: she reasons that this is all she can expect, given that she's destined to fail. Her choice to leave without saying goodbye to Fanny suggests that she's taking Martha's assessment that Fanny is exploiting her to heart. She seems to fear Fanny's reaction and would rather leave without saying goodbye than confront her stepmother.



As Sophie decides to put off speaking to Lettie and Martha, she leaves her biological family entirely behind—perhaps fearing that they won't be able to support her in her current form, especially if she can't say that she's under a curse. As an old woman, Sophie looks at the world with a new perspective. She develops more compassion for other things, like the scarecrow and the dog, who seem to have fallen on hard times. Finding a stick highlights Sophie's new helplessness: she now needs physical support to keep going.



Sophie tells the **stick** she's had two encounters now, and she expects a third. The third one comes late in the afternoon, when a shepherd of about 40 passes her. Sophie muses to herself that she would've thought him old this morning—but now, he looks young. The shepherd looks visibly worried when he sees Sophie talking to herself, and his worry turns to fear when Sophie says she's off to seek her fortune. As he hurries away, Sophie harumphs: he thought she was a witch. She continues to climb into the hills until her old body can go no further. Sitting on a stone, Sophie admires the sunset over the valley—but she's annoyed that Market Chipping still looks so close.

It gets cold as the sun sets, and Sophie thinks more and more of a fire and a comfy chair. She won't make it back to Market Chipping before midnight, though, so she decides to continue walking. The creak of her own bones is so loud that it takes her a bit to realize that she's also hearing puffing and rumbles from Wizard Howl's castle, which is coming slowly toward her. Sophie isn't afraid—indeed, seeing the chimneys, she knows there must be a fireplace inside. Reasoning that she should be safe because Wizard Howl only hunts young girls, Sophie waves her **stick** at the castle and shrieks for it to stop. To her immense satisfaction, it obeys.

CHAPTER THREE

Sophie hobbles toward a large black door in the castle wall. Even though the castle is ugly and seems to give off a chill, Sophie isn't afraid. But when she reaches for the door, her hand can't get close to it. Annoyed, Sophie hobbles to the lefthand corner, where another invisible wall stops her. She heads right, around the corner, and finds another door—but it, too, won't open. She's angry now and shouts that she'll speak to Howl about this. Continuing to the right, Sophie finds a third door. But just as Sophie reaches it, the castle moves away. Sophie runs after it, hits the door with her **stick**, and shouts for it to open. It does. Sophie barely manages to haul herself inside when she realizes there's a boy in there, just a bit older than Martha. He asks what she wants as Sophie looks around what's clearly a back room and spots the fire. Pushing the boy aside, Sophie settles herself in the chair in front of the fire.

The so-called “rule of three” is another fairytale trope; this is why there are three little pigs and why Goldilocks finds a family of three bears, for instance. Sophie continues to expect things to pan out just like she thinks they should. To some degree, they do: she experiences a third encounter. But it's a surprise to discover that this man thinks Sophie is a witch, especially when readers know that Sophie is actually the young, beautiful protagonist of her own story.



Whereas the moving castle terrified her on May Day, Sophie's priorities have changed since she became an old woman. Now that she's no longer at risk of having her heart gobbled up, she can focus on simpler things, like getting warm. In this sense, Sophie starts to put aside her fears and come into her own as an old woman. She realizes that if she asks for it, she can get what she wants—which is why it's so satisfying when the castle stops at her command.



Again, meek, fearful Sophie wouldn't have been willing to forcefully impose on an evil wizard or his teenage apprentice. But as an old lady with seemingly nothing to lose, Sophie has no problem advocating for herself and bullying this boy. Additionally, she's ready to shout at Howl for being so unhelpful—a far cry from how frightened of him she was only a few hours ago. The castle itself is clearly magical, and there's a lot about it for Sophie to figure out—such as what's around the walls where she can't go, and why it moves like it does. It's also unclear whether the castle is listening to Sophie and obeying, or whether Sophie is unwittingly working magic that causes the castle to listen to her.



The boy shuts the castle door, explains to Sophie that the castle is “bespelled” to hold together while it’s moving, and says that Howl isn’t home and won’t be back until tomorrow. He introduces himself as Michael, Howl’s apprentice, and offers to help Sophie. Sophie sighs that she’s certain Howl is the only one who can help her, so she’ll wait. Michael clearly doesn’t want Sophie to stay, but Sophie gives her name and then pretends to fall asleep. Sophie figures she’ll be gone tomorrow before Howl gets back, and she marvels at how polite Michael is. Surprisingly, Michael also looks normal. But Sophie reasons that things are just odd when it comes to wizards.

Sophie sleeps through Michael cursing as a spell he’s working on burns him. She sleeps through Michael asking the fireplace if Sophie is the Witch of the Waste—the fireplace responds that it wouldn’t have let her in if she was the Witch. Finally, in the middle of the night, long after Michael has gone to bed, Sophie jerks awake. She’s sure she’s only been asleep for a moment; Michael must’ve learned to disappear and take light with him his first week as an apprentice. Nervous, she puts two logs on the fire and looks behind her to the skull on the workbench.

Staring dreamily into the blue-green flames, Sophie imagines she sees a long, pointy face in the fire. Talking to herself, she describes the face and then wonders if she should stay to see if Howl can lift her spell. But then, she says, Howl would eat her heart. The fire asks if Sophie doesn’t want her heart to be eaten. It explains that it’s a fire demon, bound to stay in the hearth by a contract. It then asks what Sophie is, since it can tell she’s under a spell. Suddenly interested, Sophie asks if the fire demon can remove the spell. After studying her for a moment, it identifies the spell as one of the Witch of the Waste’s, says the spell has two layers, and says that Sophie can’t tell anyone who doesn’t already know about the spell.

It may take a while, the demon suggests, to figure out how to lift the spell—and it suggests they strike a bargain. It will lift Sophie’s spell if she breaks the demon’s contract. Sophie is wary. She knows demons are dangerous and evil, and this one looks particularly evil. But when the demon points out that the spell has shortened Sophie’s life by 60 years, Sophie asks if the demon is in a contract with Wizard Howl. Whining, the demon says that’s correct; he’s bound to the hearth and does most of the magic. Howl, the demon says, is heartless. Sophie doesn’t doubt this—but she’s sure the demon is just as bad. She asks what the demon is getting out of it, and it says there are benefits, but it wouldn’t have entered the contract if it’d known what life would be like. It’s being exploited.

In this passage, Sophie reveals that she has very specific ideas about how wizards look, behave, and speak. She seems to expect Michael to be rude and unhelpful—and though he doesn’t want Sophie to stick around, he’s anything but rude and unhelpful. Sophie, however, isn’t yet willing to consider that perhaps Michael is just a polite and totally normal-looking teenage boy. Rather, she still expects there to be something odd about him, because in her mind, that’s what wizards are: odd.



It creates dramatic irony when Sophie is unaware that she’s asleep—that is, it’s humorous that readers know Sophie has been sleeping but she doesn’t. However, this also provides more opportunity for Sophie to share her prejudices and beliefs about wizards and their apprentices. She remains unwilling to consider that Michael is a normal boy—and, judging by how he burns himself on the spell, is by no means a skilled wizard yet.



The fire demon is presumably what Michael spoke to in the previous passage when he asked if Sophie was the Witch of the Waste. Interestingly, the demon implies that Howl’s female victims might not totally be victims—suggesting that Sophie misunderstands what is going on between Howl and the girls he meets. That the demon can so easily identify that Sophie is bewitched, as well as the terms of the curse, suggests that Sophie might not be as alone as she thinks she is. There may, after all, be others who can also tell what’s happened to her.



Just as Sophie has distinct ideas about what wizards are and what they do, she believes demons are only one thing: evil. But as an old lady with seemingly little to lose, Sophie is more willing to take risks and at least entertain the possibility of entering into a deal with the demon. This highlights how Sophie’s new, elderly perspective is making her more willing to take risks. The demon, for its part, seems to counteract its earlier suggestion that Howl isn’t all that bad when it says that Howl is heartless. At least when it comes to beings like the demon, Howl is more than willing to exploit others and behave selfishly.



Remembering Fanny, Sophie feels sympathy for the demon—so she asks what the contract’s terms are, and how she must break it. She’ll break the contract if the demon lifts her spell. The demon celebrates, and then it says that part of the contract is that neither it nor Howl can say what the contract’s terms are. Sophie is ready to walk away, but the demon says that if Sophie watches and listens carefully, she can figure it out. And the demon promises to keep its word; it’s still in the grate, so clearly, it suggests, it’s honest.

Sighing, Sophie says she’ll need to come up with a reason to stay in Howl’s castle. The demon says Sophie will only have to stay for about a month, and it shouldn’t be hard to come up with an excuse—Howl is “pretty useless at most things.” He’s very self-absorbed. Sophie tells the demon to come up with an excuse and returns to dozing. She can’t quite remember, but the demon makes a couple suggestions and then starts singing a song in a language Sophie doesn’t recognize. She falls asleep, sure that soon, she’ll be free.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sophie is disoriented when she wakes up in a shaft of sunlight—the castle didn’t seem like it had windows last night. She opens her eyes to an almost-dead fire; the fire demon must’ve been a dream. However, Sophie aches all over and angrily shouts that she’d like to get back at the Witch of the Waste for making her old. Her anger propels her up and to the window, which looks over an unpaved street she doesn’t recognize. Turning to inspect the small room, Sophie realizes it’s extremely dirty, with dust everywhere and sludge in the sink—Howl clearly doesn’t care about his servants.

Sophie starts opening doors, looking for the rest of the castle. The first door just leads to a bathroom that’s as disgusting as the main room. There’s a shelf filled with jars and powders with odd names like “DRYING POWER,” though this is perhaps a misspelling. The second door seems to just lead to a loft, while the third door opens onto a backyard filled with junk—the exterior doesn’t match the castle at all. The final door is a broom cupboard. Sophie returns to the door she came in yesterday, which opens onto the moving hills. Returning to the window, she’s looking out on the mysterious seaside town. Sophie tells the skull she doesn’t get it.

Suddenly, the demon doesn't look all that evil—just as Sophie was being exploited in the hat shop, the demon is clearly being exploited here. Seeing this spark of recognition pushes Sophie to accept the deal. She seems unaware of it, but by striking a deal with a demon, Sophie's life gets suddenly, arguably, very interesting—suggesting that she isn't actually doomed to a boring life of failure.



The demon implies that Howl, like Sophie, is pretty set in his ways and basically will buy almost any excuse he or Sophie can come up with. And interestingly, Sophie falls asleep believing fully that she'll be free soon. This is important because Sophie clearly isn't going into this deal with the demon believing she'll fail. Perhaps she's beginning to question how set in stone destiny really is.



Sophie continues to assume that a wizard's home must look a certain way: dark and cold. However, the castle is very different than it initially seemed—and it doesn't paint a very flattering picture of Howl, given how dirty it is. Still, Sophie doesn't expect the castle to be as magical as it actually is. Readers know Sophie's conversation with the fire demon wasn't a dream, so the castle is really more magical than Sophie thinks.



Sophie continues to assume that the castle must be more than it looks like—but instead, all she finds is that each part of the castle is as dirty as the main room. Finally, Sophie is forced to admit that she doesn't understand what's going on. More broadly, this speaks to Sophie's current state: she's been made old for reasons she doesn't understand, and she doesn't know where to go from here.



When Sophie puts a log on the fire, the fire demon roars to life and reminds her they have a bargain. Sophie sits back in the chair and cries—when Michael comes in and asks what’s wrong, Sophie sniffs that she’s old. Cheerfully, Michael says it happens to everyone and offers her breakfast, but he says there’s only bread and cheese. The fire demon Calcifer, Michael explains, only allows Howl to cook on him. Annoyed, Sophie wrenches the frying pan from Michael, puts bacon in it, and tells Calcifer to stop being silly—she’ll pour water on him if he doesn’t bend down. In a whisper, she reminds him of their bargain and at this, he leans forward. Just as Sophie prepares to crack eggs, Howl gets home.

Sophie turns and stares: Howl is the young man in the blue and silver suit who tried to buy her a drink. He thinks Sophie looks familiar, but Sophie insists she’s a stranger. She’s shocked to find herself thinking that Howl is so young—it’s so different being old. As Michael and Calcifer explain that Sophie “bullied” Calcifer into letting her cook on him, Howl shrugs, takes over cooking, and asks why Sophie is here. Sophie says she’s the new cleaning lady—even if she can’t “clean [Howl] from [his] wickedness,” she can clean his castle. He tells her to set the table, but Michael does it instead.

Once Sophie, Michael, and Howl are eating around the counter, Sophie asks where the rest of the castle is. The men laugh and later, Michael explains there is no more: Howl and Calcifer just turned Howl’s old house in Porthaven into a castle. To explain why the castle moves, Howl shrugs that he must frighten people so the King doesn’t take a liking to him—he’s trying to stay out of the way of someone very powerful. Sophie thinks this is an odd way to avoid someone, but wizards must just be different than normal people.

After breakfast, someone knocks at the door and Calcifer bellows that it’s the Kingsbury door. Sophie watches, fascinated, as Howl turns a square wooden knob above the door. Each side of the square has a different color of paint on it, and Howl turns it green-side down before opening the door to a man who clearly works for the King. The man offers Howl payment for 2,000 pairs of seven-league boots. Howl pockets the bag of coins and disappears into the bathroom. Michael then explains to Sophie that that door opens in Kingsbury. He exchanges a look with Calcifer; he wishes Howl hadn’t gotten ahold of the money. When Sophie asks if she can stay, Michael says it’s impossible to know—Howl is hard to pin down.

Michael, of course, doesn’t realize that Sophie was a few years older than he is only a day ago, so he totally misses why Sophie is suddenly so upset. As Michael introduces Calcifer, Calcifer emerges as a being who’s hungry for any power he can get from his trapped spot in the grate. But Sophie shows that in her new persona as an old lady, she’s not willing to put up with nonsense like this—and she’s not afraid to bully a demon if it means she gets a warm breakfast. Michael also insinuates, however, that Howl and Calcifer have a close relationship, which may be part of their contract.



When Sophie met Howl on May Day, he seemed too old for her. But now, Sophie has a new perspective on so many things. So, even though Sophie believes Howl is evil and has even been afraid of him before, she caustically insists that she’s come to try and reform him. It starts to cut into the idea that Howl is wholly evil when he doesn’t just tell Sophie to get out—he might not be as bad as Sophie thinks he is.



Essentially, Howl and Michael insist that Howl is more or less a normal person who’s just trying to get by. His methods for evading the powerful person, however, suggest that he’s dramatic and doesn’t go about things in what Sophie would call a normal way. The note that Howl and Calcifer created the castle together uses language that suggests they have some sort of partnership; their relationship is, perhaps, not all bad.



Sophie learns once again that the castle is way more than it seems: it opens to different places in Ingary. Discovering that Howl is providing the King with seven-league boots suggests that Howl is a pretty accomplished wizard; he can create useful magical items on such a scale that he can outfit an army. However, the look that Michael and Calcifer exchange suggests that Howl isn’t competent in all areas—for one thing, they seem concerned about what he might do with the money.



CHAPTER FIVE

Sophie decides to show Howl that she's a great cleaning lady—and she's relieved that there are only a few rooms to clean. Michael and Calcifer watch, horrified, as Sophie gets to work. As she cleans, a little girl knocks on the Porthaven door and asks Michael for her dad's safety spell for his boat. The girl notices Sophie and asks if she's a witch—Sophie cackles that she is. Normally, Sophie would be embarrassed by her behavior. But as an old woman, she finds she doesn't care. When Sophie notices Michael hiding the girl's payment, Michael and Calcifer explain that Howl is awful about spending too much money. They try to keep a store hidden, just in case.

Sophie gets to work on the cobwebs near the main door so she can inspect the square knob. She's now seen three sides used (which lead to the hills, Porthaven, and Kingsbury), but where the fourth black side leads is a mystery. Howl emerges from the bathroom and tells Sophie to leave the spiders alone. When she asks where the black door leads, he scolds her for being nosy and refuses to say. He opens the door onto the hills, ignores Michael asking when he'll be back, and tells Sophie to not kill a single spider. Then, he takes his guitar and leaves. Figuring he's off hunting young girls, Sophie angrily scares off all the spiders and scrubs the floor. Both Michael and Calcifer cower out of the way.

When Howl gets home that night, Calcifer and Michael regale him with complaints about how Sophie is ruining everything with her cleaning. Howl confirms that Sophie didn't kill any spiders, and Sophie asks if they're the girls whose hearts he ate. He laughs, says they're just spiders, and goes upstairs. Still irritated with Sophie, Michael pulls out a folding bed for her and sets it up under the stairs. He notes that this doesn't necessarily mean Howl will let Sophie stay—it took Howl months to notice Michael was in the castle.

Over the next few days, Sophie scrubs every inch of the castle, much to Michael and Calcifer's chagrin. She figures that at some point, she'll find a hoard of girls' souls or something that helps her figure out what Calcifer's contract is. Howl doesn't seem to care much when Calcifer and Michael complain about Sophie. Now that Howl's customers know of Sophie's existence, they begin to bring her gifts, which Sophie uses to decorate her area under the stairs. Finally, Sophie decides to tackle the bathroom. She inspects the shelf of packets and jars, but even the ones labeled EYES and HAIR don't seem to contain girls. Rather, they're just cosmetics.

As an old woman, Sophie is fearless. It's no issue for her to make Michael and Calcifer get out of her way so she can clean, and she doesn't think twice about telling the little girl that she's a witch. This new persona is, in many ways, giving Sophie a new freedom to experiment with her identity and how she wants to interact with other people. She also continues to learn more about Howl and what kind of a person he is. That he's bad with money supports Calcifer's earlier insistence that Howl is self-absorbed, as Calcifer and Michael seem to imply that they need to hide money in case finances get really tight.



Though Howl is ostensibly supposed to be teaching Michael how to use magic, he seems far more interested in pursuing his own interests—leaving Michael to figure things out on his own. Especially since Sophie thinks Howl is off hunting girls so he can eat their hearts, this contributes to her perception of him as an evil, callous figure. Sophie settles for gaining power where she can: by making Calcifer and Michael move so she can inspect as much of the castle as she can.



Now, Michael starts to suggest that Howl isn't very perceptive when it comes to his surroundings. He just lets things change and only notices that things are different much later. But if Howl is right that the spiders are just spiders, it suggests that Sophie has misjudged him. Indeed, caring about the spiders' wellbeing would suggest that Howl is unusually compassionate to creatures that can't advocate for themselves.



At this point, Sophie is convinced that Calcifer and Howl's contract has something to do with the way Howl pursues girls. It's not at all clear if she's right to think this, so it may be clouding her ability to see what the contract is actually about. As Howl's customers get to know and love Sophie, she becomes a fixture in the castle. This gives her the courage to investigate the bathroom and its odd cosmetics—but rather than being proof that he's evil, the cosmetics just suggest Howl is preoccupied with his looks.



That night, Calcifer complains that he drained a hot spring for Sophie to clean the bathroom—when will she get to breaking his contract? Sophie notes that she needs to spend more time with Howl before she'll be able to figure things out, and Calcifer explains that Howl is only out so much when he's pursuing a woman. After the bathroom, Sophie moves on to Michael's room. He rescues a box of treasures from her, and from the contents she can see, Sophie ascertains that Michael has a sweetheart. But she doesn't ask Michael about her, and instead, she burns so much dust and garbage from his room that Calcifer chokes that Sophie is "as heartless as Howl." Michael, meanwhile, complains that whatever girl Howl is pursuing is being unusually difficult.

It's raining in Porthaven the next day, so Sophie can't clean the backyard (which is part of the Porthaven house). Instead, she spends the next few days whitewashing the main room's walls and ceilings. When Howl steps inside one day and remarks that it's brighter in the castle, Michael whispers to Calcifer that Howl's latest girlfriend must be giving in. By now, all that's left for Sophie to clean is Howl's room. She's avoided it out of fear of Howl, but she realizes now she was silly to fear him: Calcifer performs all the magic, Michael does all the grunt work, and Howl exploits them both while he spends his time snaring girls. He's no different from Fanny, and Sophie detests him.

However, Howl is standing in the doorway of his room when Sophie gets there. He says pleasantly that he likes it dirty. Sophie is shocked; she saw Howl leave the castle. Howl reminds Sophie that he is a wizard who can do magic, no matter what Calcifer may have said. Annoyed, Sophie says that no matter what Howl is, his castle is disgusting. She can see that his room is covered in dust and garbage, though she can't see a pile of girls' hearts (they're probably under the bed). But Howl swings a trailing sleeve in front of Sophie's face, tells her to stop being nosy, and sends her to go find something else to do. Sophie argues that she can't help being a neat old woman, but Howl argues that she can.

Sophie is shaken, but she's surprised Howl didn't throw her out. She decides to clean the yard, but as soon as she starts sorting trash, Howl appears and tells her to leave the yard alone. Certain there's a box of hearts in the yard, Sophie shouts at Howl, but he tells her to go do something else before he gets angry, since he hates being angry. At this, Sophie accuses him of being a "slitherer-outer," someone who hates unpleasant things and goes out of his way to avoid them. Howl backs Sophie into the house, ripping a sleeve as he does. When Sophie offers to mend it, Howl fixes the rip with a wave of his fingers—he really is a wizard. Inside, Sophie asks Michael why Howl hasn't kicked her out. Michael observes that Howl follows Calcifer's lead; most people either don't notice Calcifer or are terrified of him.

Calcifer suggests, essentially, that Sophie isn't going to get to spend much time with Howl until he's finished pursuing his latest love, and there's no telling when that will be. Put another way, Sophie is going to have to find new methods of discovering what the contract is. For that matter, Michael implies that this will happen again, since he suggests that Howl is almost always pursuing women. It's interesting that Calcifer has now twice referred to Howl as "heartless." A single use might not have meant anything, but this is, perhaps, a clue that Sophie ought to pay attention to.



Michael's implication here is that as Howl gets his way with his latest love interest, he becomes more perceptive about his surroundings. This might not bode well for Sophie, now that she's decided to tackle Howl's bedroom. However, Sophie now thinks that she knows exactly who and what Howl is: an exploitative jerk. This doesn't make him frightening; instead, it just makes him pitiful and small in Sophie's eyes.



A big difference begins to emerge between Howl and Sophie in this passage: Howl believes he can dictate what happens in his world, while Sophie insists that she essentially has to do what she's told. This passage links Howl's ability to do magic to his belief that he can change things (or, in this case, insist that things don't change, such as his messy room). And he tries to get Sophie to see that she's not powerless: she can decide to stop being a "neat old woman" if she wanted to.



Howl may act as though he can change his environment to suit his whims, but Sophie nevertheless picks up on the fact that Howl does this for a reason: he goes out of his way to avoid unpleasant things. In this case, opening himself up to Sophie (or accepting that his castle might need to be cleaned) is unpleasant, so he's going to push back on Sophie and forbid her from doing it. Still, Michael implies that this disagreement with Howl isn't enough to convince Howl to kick Sophie out. Because Sophie shows Calcifer kindness, she's passed a sort of test and can stay.



CHAPTER SIX

Howl doesn't go out for the next few days, so Sophie sits by the hearth and thinks. She realizes she's been taking out her anger at the Witch on the castle, and she's upset that Howl thinks Calcifer likes her—she feels like she's letting Calcifer down. Mending some of Michael's clothes lifts Sophie's spirits, though watching Howl easily slither out of answering questions about his latest girl makes Sophie even more certain that Howl is evil. It's interesting to watch Howl work: he works quickly and expertly, but he moves between the bench, his bedroom, and a huge spell out in the yard. The big one is a spell for the King that will move an army over marshland. Howl overcharges for the spell, hoping that the King won't try to make him the official magician and send him to find Suliman.

When Michael points it out, Sophie notices that Howl doesn't charge poor customers from Porthaven nearly enough for their spells. As she listens to Howl distract Michael from this problem by giving him a lesson on how to decode spells, she realizes she could do what Martha did and find a spell to lift the one the Witch put on her. Then she won't need Calcifer. So, when Howl takes Michael out to help with the King's spell in the yard, she digs through all the things on the workbench. Nothing makes any sense to her, though; she can't read Howl's writing at all.

Howl grows increasingly restless and spends only an hour in the bathroom the next morning. Once Michael is dressed in his best suit, he and Howl wrap up the King's spell; Michael should be gone most of the morning delivering it and showing the King how it works. Once Michael is gone, Howl grabs his guitar, says he's going for a walk, and asks Sophie to tell Michael to work on the spell on the bench. He drops a gray and scarlet suit in Sophie's lap for her to mend and disappears into the hills.

Once Howl is gone, Calcifer grumbles that he'd like to take a walk and escape his grate. Sophie asks for a hint, but Calcifer snaps that he already gave her one. Putting the suit down, Sophie gets up, turns the square knob above the door black-side-down, and opens it. There's nothing there—it's not black or white, doesn't smell, and feels like nothing. Calcifer is as intrigued as Sophie and says he doesn't know what it is; it's on the side of the castle where people can't approach, and the door opens somewhere far away. Sophie closes the door and starts to go upstairs to snoop in Howl's room, but Calcifer reveals that the door is locked and Howl asked him to say something if Sophie tried to get in. He explains he doesn't know what's in Howl's room, since he can't see anything beyond the castle's main room.

Now that Sophie and Howl have butted heads, Sophie considers how she feels about Howl thinking she's one thing—when really, she's something different. She's not a real cleaning lady, and she implies here that she doesn't think Calcifer genuinely likes her. It's worth questioning this, though, since Calcifer did let Sophie into the castle in the first place when he seemingly didn't have to. Meanwhile, Howl shows just how competent of a wizard he is when he admits that he's trying to get out of doing too much work for the King. He's good at what he does, but he also tries hard to evade responsibility.



Indeed, Howl is more of a Robin Hood sort of wizard: he's not interested in helping well-off folks and instead would rather help those most in need. But Sophie seems to brush right past this habit (which suggests that Howl is kinder and more generous than she thinks) and instead focuses on how Howl evades Michael and has terrible handwriting. She's too focused on her own goals to acknowledge what the information she's gathering about Howl might suggest.



That Howl sends Michael to deliver the spell and asks Sophie to mend a suit, all while he's out courting, continues to develop Howl as a character who goes out of his way to avoid responsibility. He's already shown that he can mend the suit himself in an instant—and yet, he seems to just be trying to keep Sophie busy by asking her to mend the suit the slow, non-magical way.



Sophie continues to learn just how constrained Calcifer is by his contract. He works with Howl and the two are somehow connected, but Howl seems to benefit from Calcifer's magical powers while also being able to keep his own secrets. And while Sophie can physically move around the castle, Howl seems to be trying to keep her just as restricted—at least when it comes to her trying to figure out more about Howl. It seems, though, like Sophie is ignoring information Calcifer has already given her and instead is (perhaps erroneously) focusing on digging up something else.



Soon after Sophie settles to mend the suit, Michael gets back—and noticing the missing guitar, he moans that he thought this lady had already fallen in love with Howl. Calcifer explains that Howl just left her alone for a few days to make her miss him. Angry and confused, Sophie asks what evil things Howl does to ladies—she expects Calcifer to be okay with it since he’s an evil demon, but she’s ashamed of Michael. Calcifer snaps that he’s not evil, and Michael says he hates Howl’s behavior. Howl, Michael explains, doesn’t eat hearts; that’s just the rumor he spread in Market Chipping. Calcifer explains that Howl only likes girls until they love him. So, he makes them love him and then leaves them. Sophie deems this “heartless,” but Calcifer notes that Howl is “made that way.”

As Sophie sews, Michael tells her about Howl’s dating life. Sophie mutters to the suit that it’s designed to eat hearts. Just as Sophie and Michael decide it’s time to make lunch, Howl gets home in a foul mood, asks for hot water in the bathroom, and confirms that Sophie didn’t touch his cosmetics. As Sophie fries eggs, Calcifer says that Howl must be dyeing his hair—hopefully Sophie left the hair spells alone, as Howl is extremely vain for a plain-looking man. Just as Sophie and Michael finish eating, Howl comes out of the bathroom, distraught: Sophie destroyed his hair spells. His hair looks no different, but he tells Sophie to look at his “ruined” hair. It’s blond, as usual, though perhaps a bit redder. When Sophie deems it “nice,” Howl shrieks that he’ll have to hide until it grows out.

As Howl continues shouting, the room grows dark and four howling human-shaped shadows converge on Sophie and Michael. Calcifer hides low in the grate, while Michael drags Sophie into Porthaven. The noise is deafening outside, too, but Michael tells Sophie they had to leave for her safety. They join a group of people huddled near the harbor until the screams die down. But when Sophie and Michael reenter the castle, Howl is covered in thick green slime. He’s oozing puddles of the slime onto the floor, and it reeks. Calcifer begs Sophie to save him; the slime is going to put him out. Sophie scolds Howl for behaving like a baby, and Michael asks if Howl is dead. Annoyed, she begins scooping ash into the puddles of slime.

As Sophie sees it, Howl isn’t just literally eating girls’ hearts—he’s also being really manipulative as he draws them in. Michael and Calcifer both seem to agree that Howl is being somewhat cruel and manipulative as he courts his love interests, suggesting that from a moral standpoint, they’re better than Sophie expects them to be. This is especially interesting when it comes to Calcifer—he’s clearly not as evil as Sophie thinks a demon should be. When Calcifer insists that Howl is “made” heartless, it again raises suspicions: why is it a feature of Howl’s existence that he’s cruel to girls? The novel leaves this a mystery for now.



Howl’s vanity is a joke to Michael and Calcifer—that Howl spends so much time in the bathroom each day is something they roll their eyes at. It’s another indicator that Sophie might be capable of magic when Calcifer confirms that Sophie left the hair spells alone. Sophie didn’t pour the cosmetics out, after all, so it follows that the only way she could’ve messed with them is through unwittingly using magic on them. But despite Howl’s vanity being a running gag for most of the novel, the beginning of Howl’s tantrum shows just how invested he is in changing his appearance: he’s willing to make everyone in the house suffer as he pursues that goal.



Howl might be dangerous while he’s in the middle of a tantrum, but Sophie isn’t afraid of him. Rather, she treats him like one would treat a child—and this deprives Howl of some of his power, since he makes such a fuss in part so his housemates (and the people of Porthaven) take him seriously. Michael and Calcifer, however, do seem genuinely afraid of Howl’s theatrics. Calcifer may have more of a point, since he can’t escape Howl’s slime, but Sophie seems to think Michael is overreacting.



A path to the bathroom cleared, Sophie pushes Howl into the bathroom with Michael's help, shoves him into the shower, and asks Calcifer for hot water. After an hour, Michael convinces Howl to put on the mended gray and scarlet suit; Sophie soaks the ruined silver and blue suit in the tub. Then, Sophie sweeps ooze onto the hills and washes the floor. As Michael settles Howl into a chair by the fire, Calcifer scolds Howl. Sophie explains to Michael that this is just a tantrum; privately, she's sure this is about more than Howl's hair. She warms up a mug of milk and asks what's going on with the lady.

In a sad voice, Howl says the lady isn't sure she loves him—and she says there's another man. He continues that she's gorgeous, and he doesn't understand why she isn't smitten. Though Sophie had started to feel sorry for Howl, she doesn't anymore. She acidly suggests he use a love potion and gets even angrier when he says that's not playing the game fairly. But Howl ignores Sophie's scolding and says that he thinks of lovely Lettie Hatter all the time. Sophie feels suddenly anxious: Martha has clearly been busy, and she's not in love with anyone at Cesari's.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sophie is very sore and creaky after standing in the Porthaven drizzle, so she's unable to go that night to warn Martha about Howl. She's still sore the next morning, but she grabs her **stick** and prepares to leave while Howl is primping in the bathroom. He emerges before Sophie can even reach her stick, saying that he likes his hair this color and that Sophie greatly improved his suit. Noticing Sophie's dour mood, he promises to do something for her rheumatism when he gets back from seeing the King and then leaves through the Kingsbury door. He flashes a dazzling smile as he goes, which makes Sophie feel a bit better—and worried for Martha.

After giving Calcifer another log, Sophie starts for the door again. But Michael rushes out first, telling Sophie where a sea captain's spell is in case he calls. Calcifer assures Sophie nobody will be locked out if she leaves and asks her to leave a pile of logs where he can reach them. Someone knocks on the door, so Sophie goes to open it. But instead of a person, the caller is the scarecrow Sophie spoke to when she left Market Chipping—and it seems angry and desperately wants to get in. Sophie screams for Calcifer to make the castle go faster, and soon, the scarecrow is left clinging to the castle wall. It's not giving up. Slamming the door, Sophie realizes this is what she gets for trying to seek her fortune as an eldest child.

Howl takes his anger and frustration out on the castle by filling it with ooze, in much the same way Sophie took her anger at the Witch out on the castle by cleaning it. So, though their methods differ, they're both doing more or less the same thing here. Sophie, however, steps into a more mature and maternal role when she gives Howl milk and tries to talk to him about what's going on. She can do this because despite being younger than Howl, she looks and acts much older, thanks to the Witch's curse.



Howl proposes that there's no reason why any woman would reject his advances—which Sophie thinks is an entitled attitude. Sophie's rage grows when she discovers that Howl is trying to court Martha. Even though Sophie left home without saying goodbye, she remains loyal to her sisters and doesn't want to see them get hurt. And now that she knows that Howl makes girls love him and then drops them, she knows Martha will soon be hurt, too.



Sophie sees Howl as entitled and dismissive—he threw a massive tantrum yesterday that caused Sophie to have to do a lot of extra work cleaning up after him, and he's being awfully glib about it. He doesn't know, however, that Sophie is also upset that he's courting Martha, and that this is no doubt influencing Sophie's bad mood. However, despite Sophie's many uncharitable thoughts about Howl, Howl does suggest that he can be a caring person: he wants to help Sophie feel better physically, after all.



Everyone and everything, it seems, is conspiring to keep Sophie from leaving the moving castle (except, perhaps, Calcifer). That the scarecrow has come to life and now seems evil causes Sophie to think that the world is out to get her—and that this is just part of her lot in life, since she's the eldest of three. However, Sophie nevertheless works hard to try to get away from the scarecrow, suggesting that she may already be learning from Howl and her sisters that she can at least try to make things go her way.



As Sophie tries to look out the windows at the scarecrow (she can't because none of the windows look onto the moors), she realizes the worst part of being an old lady: her heart is pounding, and it hurts. Trembling, she sits by the fire and tries to explain her heart problems to Calcifer. When he doesn't understand, Sophie snaps that that's because he doesn't have a heart. Calcifer informs her that he does, under the logs. They then argue over whether Calcifer can reduce the castle's speed. Sophie returns to the door to peek outside; the scarecrow is 50 yards behind the castle, but still pursuing them. Calcifer protests, but Sophie begs him to make the castle go faster.

Throughout the day, items in the castle shake due to the speed. By late afternoon, the scarecrow is out of sight. Calcifer slows the castle down and goes to sleep. Sophie is feeling better, so she investigates Howl's suit soaking in the bathroom. It's stained and has shrunk, but Sophie knows she can mend it. She cheerfully starts dinner, chatting to the skull as she chops—and almost cuts herself out of fear when the door bursts open and Michael comes in with an armful of prepared foods. He grabs Sophie and pulls her into a celebratory dance. Finally, Sophie asks him to explain what's going on, and he shouts happily that Lettie loves him, not Howl. Howl must be pursuing a different Lettie Hatter.

Sophie confirms that Michael loves the Lettie at Cesari's, and she's happy for Martha: Michael is sensible, kind, and has a career ahead of him. Relieved, she says she's Martha's great-aunt and sits back in her chair. Unfortunately, she knows Howl must be in love with the real Lettie. As Michael invites Sophie to inspect the cake, Sophie realizes that Michael likes her now. She decides to tell him the truth about herself, Lettie, and Martha—but Howl bursts in before Sophie can say anything. Howl looks approvingly at a cake from Cesari's, notices the chopped onions everywhere, and picks a piece out of the skull's eye. The skull chatters at him in response, which seems to startle Howl.

Then, Howl sighs that he needs someone to “blacken his name” to the King. The most recent spell for the King worked perfectly, and Howl is afraid the King will appoint him Royal Magician. He calls for Calcifer so they can decide how to proceed, and even stabs a poker into the logs to wake Calcifer up. When Calcifer grunts that he's tired, Sophie explains what happened with the scarecrow. Howl is shocked that Calcifer made the castle go faster just to appease Sophie, and he's not pleased—he thinks Sophie bullied Calcifer.

Again, Sophie continues to make assumptions about Calcifer that she then discovers aren't at all true. Indeed, the revelation that he has a heart makes Calcifer seem even more sympathetic and human—though it's also left to the reader's imagination whether it's normal for demons to have hearts. When Calcifer agrees to make the castle go faster, it suggests that he's developing more loyalty to Sophie. He wants her to break his contract, but he also doesn't want her to be afraid and in pain.



Given how intent Sophie was on leaving to go warn Martha this morning, it's interesting that by evening, she's so content staying in the castle. This may suggest that she's settling in; Howl, Michael, and Calcifer may already be becoming a sort of chosen family for Sophie. Indeed, when Michael comes home and immediately begins celebrating with Sophie, it suggests that he sees her as an ally and a friend rather than as the evil person responsible for cleaning his room.



As far as Sophie is concerned, hearing that Michael and Martha are in love is the best thing she's heard all day. She no longer fears that Michael is strange and evil because he's a wizard in training—indeed, she acknowledges now that a career in magic is sensible. Additionally, Sophie picks up on the fact that she and Michael are growing closer. She tries to strengthen their relationship further by telling him the whole truth about her sisters; her desire to do this is indicative of how much she likes Michael, even if she's not successful in sharing the information.



Howl's entitlement shines through here: he expects Calcifer to be ready to chat whenever he's ready. Howl also seems perturbed that Calcifer and Sophie are developing a closer relationship. However, part of this has to do with the fact that Howl doesn't seem to take the scarecrow seriously, and if he doesn't think something is a big deal, he wants everyone else to agree with him.



As they eat the cold pie, Howl explains that the King is trying to get him to volunteer to go look for Prince Justin. When Sophie asks why Howl is trying to get out of this, Howl snaps that he knows he can find Justin and doesn't think Wizard Suliman is dead. But he doesn't want to go to the Waste, because the Witch of the Waste sent a spell after him last year and he's only barely avoiding it. He explains that the Witch is unloved and everyone is afraid of her—Sophie should sympathize.

Before Sophie can respond, Michael asks if they should move the castle. Howl says it's not a bad idea, if the King and the Witch are after him. Then, he suggests that Sophie should pose as his elderly mother and go say awful things about him to the King. If she can bully Calcifer, the King will be easy. Sophie decides she's had enough. She's leaving tomorrow to go find Lettie.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Everyone is relieved when Calcifer is back to his normal self the next morning. Calcifer tells Howl that he was truly just tired; something was making the castle extra heavy. Howl assures Calcifer he doesn't have to put up with Sophie's bullying, says he's off to see Lettie, and grabs his guitar. But when he opens the door, the scarecrow is there, and it tries to push past Howl. Howl's guitar begins to twang of its own accord, while Calcifer and Michael are just shocked that there's actually a scarecrow. Finally, Howl heaves the scarecrow out of the doorway, steps out after it, and tells it to go away. When it won't, Howl uses magic to make it fly away into the clouds. Then, Howl tells Sophie he's sorry: the scarecrow *is* scary and is made of strong magic.

Howl turns to tease Sophie about the scarecrow being her last cleaning client—but her heart is acting up again. He immediately helps her to her chair, and something passes between him and Calcifer. Sophie's heart evens out immediately. Howl instructs Michael to keep Sophie home all day, grabs his guitar, and leaves. Sophie pretends to feel very ill as Michael gets started on a spell. Then, claiming the castle is too stuffy, Sophie opens the door onto the hills and steps out (Calcifer stops the castle for her). She sets off in the direction Howl went—but moments later, Michael races after her, with the castle coming along behind him. As Sophie explains where she's going and that this Lettie Hatter is her grandniece, Michael realizes she's concerned that Howl is courting Lettie.

Essentially, Howl's reasoning shows that he's thinking about himself and not necessarily the greater good—but he tries to make himself look good by noting that he could find Justin and Suliman, if only he wanted to. Additionally, he tries to get Sophie to see that the Witch, while scary, is really just a person and isn't so different from Sophie.



Sophie decides to leave mostly because Howl isn't taking her seriously. She's afraid of the scarecrow, for one, and she has no interest in helping Howl evade responsibility. For Howl's part, he's seeing what he wants to see when he looks at Sophie: a bully whose presence could be convenient, if she agrees to help him.



Howl continues to act as though Sophie is being absolutely ridiculous and making things up. But when he comes face to face with the scarecrow himself, he has to change and start empathizing with Sophie. He also begins to trust that she is indeed capable of identifying nefarious things. His apology is extremely important, as apologizing is how he lets Sophie know that he now takes her seriously and wants to make up for being rude to her yesterday. Being willing to apologize, moreover, suggests that Howl is kinder than Sophie thinks.



Howl demonstrates how caring he is when he and Calcifer immediately work together to relieve Sophie's heart pain. He doesn't want her to suffer, and since he can do something about her pain, he sees no reason not to help. This again suggests that Howl is a better, kinder person than Sophie thinks he is—at least when it comes to women he's not interested in romantically. However, Sophie continues to see him as a dangerous rogue who poses a threat to her sister. Michael and Calcifer show their loyalty to Sophie by chasing after her—and Calcifer making the castle move like this provides some humor as well.



Michael argues with Sophie—he's not supposed to let her go anywhere. (Sophie hates this; Howl just thinks she's useful now since she can badmouth him to the King.) But finally, Michael suggests they go to Upper Folding together, using seven-league boots. They'll get there before Howl. Michael grabs the boots out of the closet; they look more like buckets than boots. Sitting on the doorstep, he and Sophie each put a foot in a boot, point themselves in the direction of Upper Folding, and take a step. Everything rushes for a moment—and then Sophie and Michael are in the Upper Folding village square. But Sophie staggers on the landing, and she spends several moments zipping back and forth dozens of miles before she lands on her bottom in Upper Folding and Michael tears off her boot.

Michael and Sophie head for Mrs. Fairfax's house, which is grand and surrounded by a garden full of flowers, bees, and hummingbirds. When Mrs. Fairfax opens the door, she doesn't recognize Sophie. Michael explains that Sophie is here to see Lettie, her grandniece, and Mrs. Fairfax invites them inside. Before Sophie and Michael can enter, though, a collie dog rushes out the door. Mrs. Fairfax hisses for them to stop the dog. Michael finally catches it before it can enter an orchard—and in the orchard, Sophie sees, are Howl and Lettie. Lettie, to Sophie's surprise, looks like herself. She also looks devoted to Howl. Mrs. Fairfax ushers Sophie, Michael, and the dog (who she says keeps trying to bite Howl) back inside.

Sophie suggests that the dog has the right idea, but Mrs. Fairfax says she knows Lettie's suitor is Wizard Howl. He used a false name and clearly didn't remember her, but Mrs. Fairfax remembers him: he was old Mrs. Pentstemmon's last pupil. Michael asks if Mrs. Fairfax is aware of Howl's reputation, but Mrs. Fairfax says it's just gossip. And anyway, she continues, she knows Lettie could learn more from Howl than from her, so she encouraged Lettie to accept Howl's advances. Sophie asks if it isn't true that Lettie loves someone else. Mrs. Fairfax says conspiratorially that the man is under a strong spell, the work of the Witch of the Waste. But the poor man can't speak to ask someone like Howl to lift it.

At this, Michael says he and Sophie should leave. They walk to the gate, Mrs. Fairfax behind them. Finally, Sophie asked if Martha was supposed to come be her apprentice. Laughing, Mrs. Fairfax explains she recognized what was going on with the switching spell at once, but she told Lettie to stay as herself or leave. She'd rather teach someone who wants to learn. With this, Michael collects the seven-league boots. Seeing them, Mrs. Fairfax asks if Lettie inherited her witchcraft from Sophie. Before Sophie can answer, Michael steps forward and they zip away. They nearly collide with the castle. Inside, Calcifer is yelling that there's someone at the Porthaven door.

Sophie seems insistent on believing that Howl just wants to use her (rather than accepting at face value that he cares about her health and her pain). But she is willing to accept Michael's help, which continues to strengthen their relationship. Noting that the seven-league boots look like buckets and not conventional boots is another subtle way the novel encourages readers to understand that nothing in this world is as it seems. Some of the most innocuous-looking things are actually very powerful—perhaps even Sophie herself.



Since Mrs. Fairfax doesn't recognize Sophie, Sophie has the freedom to essentially be whoever she wants. She doesn't have to behave the way Mrs. Fairfax would expect teenage Sophie Hatter to act. But the fact that Mrs. Fairfax doesn't recognize Sophie shows that not everyone in this magical world is willing or able to look closely at someone like Sophie and see what's actually there (that is, Sophie's curse). Now, Sophie discovers that she's not alone in thinking that Howl is bad news: this dog seems to share Sophie's assessment of Howl.



It seems to be a bit of a shock for Sophie to discover not only that Mrs. Fairfax knows who Howl is, but that Mrs. Fairfax also doesn't fear Howl or think he's a bad person. Indeed, she seems to think highly of him—and think he's trustworthy, if she's encouraging Lettie to accept his romantic advances. Sophie brushes over this a bit and instead focuses on making sure that Lettie is getting what she wants out of this relationship (which, as Sophie understands, is this other man who's under a curse). This highlights Sophie's loyalty to and love for her sister.



It seems to come as a surprise to Sophie that Mrs. Fairfax had such an easy time identifying Martha and Lettie's switch and the spell they used. This offers some possibility that perhaps Mrs. Fairfax recognizes Sophie's curse as well, but simply isn't saying anything. Mrs. Fairfax also implies that Sophie does indeed have magical powers when she asks if Lettie inherited her witchcraft from Sophie. But asking the question in this way also suggests that Mrs. Fairfax believes Sophie truly is an old woman, leaving it unclear what she might know about Sophie's curse.



CHAPTER NINE

The captain is at the door, and he's very upset. Once Michael has gotten him the spell, Michael returns to his spell and Sophie mends her stockings. Sophie needs new clothes, but she's too afraid to cut into Howl's ruined suit to make herself something. After a while, Michael asks how many nieces Sophie has. He's clearly agitated as he rips up pages of notes and says that his Lettie is far prettier than Mrs. Fairfax's Lettie. Still worried for the real Lettie, Sophie asks if Howl could possibly be truly in love this time. Calcifer and Michael snort; they'll believe Howl is in love when he doesn't spend hours in the bathroom before seeing a girl. Sophie realizes they're right.

Working up her courage, Sophie cuts into Howl's ruined suit to make herself a patchwork skirt. When Michael burns pages of notes, it becomes clear he's struggling with his spell. He begins combining things like soot, an odd root, and a swirling seashell he picks up in Porthaven. As Michael fiddles with ingredients, he says he feels bad about spying on Howl, since Howl has been so kind to him. He explains that his parents died a few years ago, and he started sleeping in Howl's Porthaven doorway. Eventually he fell inside, started talking to Calcifer, and six months later, Howl took him on as an apprentice. Calcifer notes that during that first conversation, Michael just dumped all his troubles on Calcifer, with no thought for the demon's troubles—and Calcifer does have troubles.

Michael says he thinks he has been helpful with money—Howl spends so much on clothes. Calcifer watches Sophie lay out a skirt cut from suit pieces, and Michael points out that Howl is really just bad with money. Last winter they had no wood, and Howl bought the skull and the guitar with the last of their money. Howl took wood from someone who supposedly owed him money, and they ate seaweed. By now, Michael is chalking a pentagram on the floor—and the spell explodes.

Michael asks Sophie if she could help him with the spell. The paper he gives her is strangely shiny. The spell reads: "Go and catch a falling star, / Get with child a mandrake root, / Tell me where all past years are, / Or who cleft the Devil's foot. / Teach me to hear the mermaids singing, / Or to keep off envy's stinging, / And find / What wind / Serves to advance an honest mind." Then, it tells the magician to decide what the spell is about and write a second verse. Sophie is extremely confused, and Michael's attempts to explain his reasoning don't help. She says it looks like a list of impossible tasks. Michael insists it must be possible, and he needs to impress Howl.

Howl still seems intimidating to Sophie now that he's proved he's a real wizard, so she simply assumes that he wouldn't approve of her trying to make some new clothes for herself. That Michael is so willing to confide in Sophie, meanwhile, highlights how close the two are becoming. And Michael and Calcifer show Sophie how well they know Howl when they insist that it'll be really obvious when he's in love. They do, however, speak in a tone that suggests they don't expect Howl to genuinely fall in love anytime soon.



Finally, Michael gives Sophie some insight into his own backstory. He paints Howl as a difficult figure, but one who is still extremely kind and caring—he took Michael in when he was orphaned, after all. And now Michael has a career ahead of him as a magician, thanks to the apprenticeship. Calcifer's addition to Michael's story adds some depth to Calcifer's character. Michael speaks in such a way that it seems like he doesn't see Calcifer as a three-dimensional being, with problems of his own. He may be kind to Calcifer, but Calcifer implies that few people, if anyone, see him for who he truly is.



Howl might be kind to Michael, but Michael implies that it's impossible to know how kind Howl is to other people—Howl might've stolen the wood. And Howl continues to seem pretty selfish as he prioritizes purchasing the skull and the guitar over feeding his household and keeping everyone warm. Still, Michael's assessment of Howl's character is pretty nuanced: Howl is kind and generous, if a bit selfish at times.



Readers may be familiar with Michael's "spell": it's a poem by 17th-century poet John Donne, and it is, as Sophie suggests, a list of impossible tasks. It's impossible to tell at this point whether John Donne's work exists in Ingary, or whether Sophie and Michael are fully in the dark about what they're working with. Either way, Michael insists on looking at the spell/poem in one very particular way—and seemingly because he refuses to wonder if he should approach it a different way, he fails to assemble the spell correctly.



Sophie and Michael spend hours arguing over the spell and making notes. Finally, after dinner, Sophie suggests they take the seven-league boots and try to catch a falling star. Just as they're about to leave the castle, the skull starts chattering and Calcifer begs them not to leave. They go anyway and hike toward the marshes outside of Porthaven. Then, they stand and watch for a star. It takes hours before they finally spot one and zip after it. Michael gets close to the star, which seems afraid and has big eyes and a pointed face. But it becomes terrified when Sophie approaches. It says it would rather die than be caught and flings itself into a pool of water, where it sizzles and dies. Sighing, Michael helps Sophie home. He decides he can't work the spell. Fortunately, he says, Howl will be helpful now that Lettie's giving in.

The poem might be a list of impossible tasks, but at least one is theoretically possible to accomplish in Ingary: catching a fallen star. It's interesting that Calcifer begs Sophie and Michael not to go—and that the falling star's appearance seems to resemble Calcifer's. The chattering skull also seems like a warning that catching a falling star isn't something Sophie and Michael should try to do. Seeing the star die like this is sad, and it puts a damper on Michael's willingness to keep trying to decode the spell. He isn't afraid to be vulnerable in front of Howl and ask for help.



CHAPTER TEN

Howl is home and in the bathroom when Sophie and Michael get back. He emerges when Sophie is cooking breakfast and teases her for destroying his best suit, for running around so much yesterday, and for snooping on him and Lettie. Sophie snaps that judging by the look on Lettie's face, Howl won't need to visit her much longer. Offended, Howl says he's not leaving Lettie anytime soon and heads out to see the King. He refuses to help Michael with the spell before he goes, so Michael leaves to go visit Martha. Feeling guilty, Sophie begins to sew the triangles she cut back into Howl's silver suit.

Recall that Michael and Calcifer will only believe Howl is in love when he doesn't spend hours in the bathroom before seeing the lady in question. So, the fact that Howl is in the bathroom for a long time before visiting Lettie suggests Sophie is right: he's not truly in love with her. Sophie's guilt is interesting, as it suggests she wants to impress Howl, or at least make him happy. Putting his suit back together the old-fashioned way is one way she can show him she cares and values him.



Sophie spends much of the day dispensing spells in Porthaven and Kingsbury, aided by Calcifer (who tells her which door to open and which powders to package up). The only difficult customer is a young man in Kingsbury who asks for something to make him win a duel. Sophie scolds him for dueling, but she packages some cayenne pepper for him and tells him to throw it in the air before the duel starts. When the boy leaves, Calcifer asks when Sophie is going to free him so he can go watch duels. He says Sophie might get a hint about what the contract entails later.

Sophie is becoming part of the household. She's performing work that Michael usually does, and she and Calcifer are working together as a team to do it. Sophie's personality and spark also continue to emerge, as when she scolds this young man for dueling. This is, it seems, not something she would've done before the Witch made her old. Calcifer's note that there may be a hint later puts both Sophie and readers on the alert so they can piece together the mystery of his and Howl's contract.



When Michael gets home in the late afternoon, he tells Sophie all about his time with Martha. Later, when Howl arrives with packages, he's hurt and angry: nobody but him is working and nobody will even say hello. When Sophie asks, Howl says the King asked him to go find Prince Justin and suggested he kill the Witch of the Waste too. He won't let Sophie make dinner and instead tells her to look interested in the gifts he brought her: silk stockings, fine petticoats, a silk dress, and a matching shawl and boots. Michael unwraps a new velvet suit but says he doesn't need it. Howl argues that both Michael and Sophie need new clothes to see the King. Sophie initially refuses to see the King—but when she realizes Howl will move the castle and break both her sisters' hearts if she refuses, she agrees.

Howl lays out the plan: the King is expecting Sophie tomorrow, and Michael will go as her footman. He coaches her through exactly what to say and then suggests that she first visit his old tutor, Mrs. Pentstemmon, so she has some practice speaking to powerful people. Then, finally, Howl turns to Michael and asks what he wants. Michael gives Howl the spell he can't crack and says they failed to catch a star. Howl's eyebrows shoot up. He says this is Sophie's fault, or perhaps the skull's: the proper spell isn't here, and Sophie must've opened the black door. Howl runs upstairs to look for a book, but he can't find it.

Howl then confirms that Michael *failed* to catch a star, seeming angrier by the second. He accuses Sophie of egging Michael on—and then Calcifer points out that it's not such a big deal. Howl, after all, caught a star once. Howl glares at Calcifer and then makes Michael promise not to try to catch a star again. Then, staring at the paper, Howl says he can't remember the rest of it, and he thinks the next verse is important. After deliberating for a moment, he turns the doorknob black-down and tells Michael and Sophie to come, so he can keep an eye on them. As Sophie hurries to the door, Calcifer says she got her hint.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The nothingness is only an inch thick, so Sophie passes onto a street lined with new houses. Once she joins Howl and Michael in the street, Howl says they need clothes to fit in: Michael is suddenly wearing stiff blue pants and canvas shoes, while Howl's suit transforms into a jacket that says, inexplicably, WELSH RUGBY. Sophie's skirt just gets a bit shorter. Howl then leads the way back up the path and into the house. There's a magic box with moving and speaking pictures in it, a woman knitting, and a tiny girl—who runs straight into "Uncle Howell's" arms. After speaking to the girl in a foreign language, Howl introduces Sophie and Michael to his niece, Mari, and his sister, Megan. Megan looks anxious and disapproving.

Though Sophie, Michael, and Calcifer all believe that Howl mostly spends his days playing and flirting, Howl shows here that he expects them all to be busy. But as when he threw the tantrum, his bad mood is about more than just being annoyed with Sophie and Michael. Rather, he's struggling to process the King's request. The quality of the clothing he bought Sophie suggests either that he wants Sophie to look the part of a grand old lady—or he simply wants Sophie to have nice things. Sophie refuses to consider this possibility, however.



As Howl frames it, he doesn't think that Sophie will be able to keep it together in front of the King without some practice first—something that is somewhat insulting to Sophie. Things get more interesting when Howl reacts this way to Michael's spell. He confirms that the poem isn't actually a spell, and he implies that it came through the black door when Sophie opened it. Howl also implies that there's more to the skull than anyone else knows, if he suggests the skull might be to blame.



Recall the shape of the falling star's face—it resembled Calcifer's. Calcifer may have been a falling star, though the novel doesn't confirm this yet. (Calcifer's cryptic note that Sophie got her hint, though, suggests this is correct.) Howl's angry reaction to the fact that Michael tried at all to catch a star suggests he may regret having caught a star himself once. The contract might not be helping him much, either, or his current relationship with Calcifer might not be as good as Sophie thinks it is.



That the nothingness is pretty much just a curtain highlights again how characters in the novel bank on others' tendency to make assumptions. Howl seems to have bet on the fact that nobody was going to walk into nothing—and he was right. This allowed him to keep it secret that he has a family through this door, in what seems like the reader's world. Judging by Megan's expression, Howl has a somewhat strained relationship with his sister, even as he develops a close and loving relationship with his niece.



Howl tells Megan he's only here for a minute, and he asks if Neil is missing some English homework. Megan says he is: he gave his new English teacher, Miss Angorian, a "funny old piece of writing" that he found instead. He's upstairs with "that machine of his." So, Howl leads Sophie and Michael up the stairs, Mari's hand in his. In a bedroom, two boys are crouched over one of several "magic boxes" growing on white stalks attached to the wall. One boy tells Howl to not distract Neil, since Neil will lose his life—but Howl pulls a plant's roots out of the wall anyway.

Neil glares at his uncle, but when Howl promises to make a new computer game for Neil, Neil identifies the strange paper as a poem Miss Angorian gave them as homework last week. He says he gave her the funny writing he found, and she took it home. Once Neil tells Howl where Miss Angorian lives, Howl teases his nephew, hands over a flat packet, and plugs the roots back into the wall. Sophie is shocked by all she's seen. But when she reaches the bottom of the stairs, Howl and Megan are arguing: Megan sold Howl's books. Megan insists that Howl is a disgrace, and she can't just store his stuff. He doesn't have a job and just hangs around with "layabouts." Sophie understands now how Howl learned to slither out of things—Megan is intimidating.

Sophie steps forward, suggests Howl's servants are probably selling his valuables, and tells Megan that Howl is very busy. As she leads the way to the door, Howl asks Megan if his car is still here. She says he has the only key. With this, Howl leads Sophie and Michael out of the house to a small white building. Sophie desperately wants to forget what happens next: they ride in a very fast, horseless carriage over steep roads. They soon reach the appointed building and Howl rings a bell. Miss Angorian answers—and to everyone's shock, she's young and beautiful, with dark hair and huge eyes. She already knows who Howl is. Howl swallows his surprise and turns on the charm, and Sophie suspects his romance with Lettie is over.

Howl explains to Miss Angorian that he's looking for the paper Neil turned in last week, and she invites him in. In the living room, Sophie sinks into an uncomfortable chair, and Michael blushes as Howl flirts. Finally, Miss Angorian locates the paper and asks Howl if he knows what it is. He tries to grab her hand as he takes the paper (she avoids him) and then Howl hands the spell to Michael. Michael identifies it as an enlargement spell, and Miss Angorian asks what Howl is doing with it. He reminds her that he wrote his doctoral thesis on spells and charms, and he swears that he doesn't practice "black magic." It's just old, valuable, and an object of study.

The close third-person narration, which sticks to Sophie's point of view, creates humor here. Ingary clearly isn't a world where electronics exist: Neil and his friend seem to be on a computer, but Sophie doesn't have any understanding of electronics. Similarly, Megan has no idea what Ingary is like when she calls Howl's spell a "funny old piece of writing."



At first, Sophie is simply overwhelmed by how different this world is compared to her own. But when she comes upon Howl and Megan fighting, she discovers that some things don't change much, no matter whether one has magic or not: family relationships can still be really difficult. Indeed, Howl's chosen family with Michael and Calcifer seems far more supportive and healthier than Howl's relationship with Megan's family. Part of his bad relationship with her, though, is tied to the fact that she thinks Howl is just wasting his time—when Sophie and Michael know that this isn't entirely true.



Sophie is acting, mostly for Megan's benefit. But it's interesting that she's essentially willing to say nice things about Howl under these circumstances—she may think better of him than she lets on most of the time. Miss Angorian's young, beautiful appearance is a shock for everyone. But now, Sophie gets to see how exactly how Howl manages to draw in so many women and break their hearts. That Miss Angorian already knows who Howl is, however, raises questions about whether Howl will be successful—she may know about his reputation with women.



It seems to go right over Michael and Sophie's heads, but Howl reveals here that he's highly educated (he's earned a Ph.D.). This could explain why Megan is so disappointed in him: he's spent a lot of time and money on his education, but she can't see any of what he's doing with that education due to her living in the non-magical world. It's a bit odd, then, that Miss Angorian seems to imply that Howl might actually be practicing "black magic." Her word choice suggests that she thinks magic is real, a view that seems incompatible with her living in the non-magical world.



In return, Miss Angorian asks for her photocopy back. As he dangles the paper in front of her, Howl asks who the poet is. She severely says it's John Donne and reaches for the book on her shelf. When Howl asks Miss Angorian out, she insists she's still engaged to Ben Sullivan who disappeared years ago. Then, she begins to read the second verse of the poem. It asks a reader who can see invisible things to ride 10,000 days and nights, until their hair is white, and then return with stories about what they saw. But that person, the speaker says, will still not be able to say that a faithful woman exists. Sophie notices that Howl's face is white. He hurriedly says that he doesn't need to hear the rest; the woman remains unfaithful, and it's time to go.

Assuring Miss Angorian he's fine, Howl hurries Sophie and Michael out of the apartment and into the horseless carriage. Howl is clearly upset, but he refuses to tell Michael what's going on when Michael asks. Finally, as they approach the yellow house again, Howl says the Witch of the Waste's curse is catching up, and he'll be 10,000 days old on Midsummer Day. He'll have to go back to the Witch then. He mutters about avoiding mandrake roots and mermaids as he opens the door to reveal Calcifer inside. When Howl says the Witch has caught up, Calcifer says he "felt it take."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Sophie doesn't see any point now in badmouthing Howl to the King, but Howl insists he can't fight off the King *and* the Witch at the same time. So the next afternoon, Sophie and Michael dress in their new clothes and wait for Howl to finish in the bathroom. Sophie tells Calcifer about the strange country through the black door while she waits. Calcifer is impressed with the Witch's curse; sending it in through a totally different world is very clever. He says Howl was a fool to tell the Witch too much about himself. Sophie isn't surprised that Calcifer admires the curse, but she can't tell if he really detests Howl or not. Calcifer admits that he's afraid, since he'll suffer if the Witch catches Howl.

Just then, Howl emerges from the bathroom. He grudgingly allows Sophie to take her "awful old **stick**" with her, and then he escorts Sophie and Michael into Kingsbury. It's extremely hot, and Sophie feels a bit unwell as they walk to Mrs. Pentstemmon's tall house. Once the footman lets them in, the boy leads them into an elegant drawing room. Mrs. Pentstemmon is dressed all in gold silk—and she's both beautiful and frightening. Howl kisses her gold-gloved hand and then introduces Sophie as his mother. Once Sophie and Howl sit, Mrs. Pentstemmon says she's 86 and in poor health. Sophie shares that she's 90, and Howl interjects that Sophie is too active for her age.

Howl may have enough of a reputation in the real world for Miss Angorian to not want anything to do with him. Howl is correct about the ending of the John Donne poem: the final verse insists again that there's no such thing as a faithful woman. It's impossible to tell at this point why Howl finds this so disturbing, but it is worth considering that Howl hasn't yet been able to commit to a woman, faithful or otherwise. And as a wizard, Howl no doubt has the ability to see invisible or impossible things. This poem, in other words, may have more implications for Howl's life than simply being his nephew's misplaced homework.



Howl confirms here that the poem isn't just a poem: it's the Witch's curse, and he won't be able to evade it for much longer. Notice that Howl seems to frame it as destiny, or at least as a guarantee, that he'll have to go back to the Witch. But unlike Sophie, he's going out of his way to plan how to avoid the curse as much as possible. He doesn't accept it as inevitable and instead, as Sophie's sisters did, is fighting to live life his own way.



The differences between Sophie and Howl come into focus again here: Sophie seems to think it's no use doing anything but sitting around and waiting for the curse, while Howl believes he can at least try to thwart destiny. Sophie continues to think badly of Calcifer, despite evidence that Calcifer isn't an evil being. Indeed, she should realize that one can admire the Witch's cleverness without agreeing with what she's doing. And that seems to be exactly what Calcifer is doing—especially since he could suffer if the Witch gets Howl.



In Kingsbury, Sophie is totally out of her element—and the heat makes this feeling even more pronounced. It's also becoming more difficult for Sophie to fully embody an old lady persona as she confronts an actual old woman. But as Howl observes, Sophie is more active than many 90-year-olds—and part of this seems to be due to her walking stick. It's not pretty, but it helps Sophie navigate the world while she's stuck in her current elderly body.



Giving him a withering glare, Mrs. Pentstemmon tells Howl that she's speaking to his mother, who's certainly proud of him. They're going to talk about him, so he and Michael should go drink something cold on the porch. Howl looks surprised but he shrugs, gives Sophie a look, and leaves with Michael. Mrs. Pentstemmon starts in on critiquing Howl. She preferred his hair black, and she says he's "going to the bad." Sophie thinks he's already bad, but says nothing. Instead, she murmurs as Mrs. Pentstemmon talks about Howl's suit, which has charms to attract ladies darned into the seams. Sophie darned the seams herself and didn't notice anything, but she figures she's no expert.

Then, Mrs. Pentstemmon says she's going to die soon; this is why she wanted to see Sophie. She explains that Howl was her last pupil; she was going to retire after training Benjamin Sullivan, whom Sophie probably knows as Wizard Suliman. But Howl showed from the start that he was smarter and better, as well as a force for good. But, Mrs. Pentstemmon says, something has happened to his goodness. She suspects he's become like the Witch of the Waste, who apparently wasn't always evil. Then, she asks Sophie what she thinks is going on. Remembering Calcifer saying that the contract isn't helping him or Howl, Sophie mentions that Howl has a contract with his fire demon.

Mrs. Pentstemmon tells Sophie to break the contract; she should be able to, thanks to her "maternal feelings" and her magical gift. It brings things to life, such as her **stick**—which is now a sort of magic wand. Sophie is flustered, but Mrs. Pentstemmon closes her eyes and continues. She says the Witch made a contract with a fire demon and that demon has, over the years, taken control—demons don't understand good and evil, but they will work with people for something only humans have. A contract prolongs the demon and the person's life. Sophie must find out what Calcifer is getting. Then, Mrs. Pentstemmon says she must rest.

A page immediately appears to usher Sophie out. Sophie is so uncomfortable; she's impressed Howl survived a day as Mrs. Pentstemmon's student. As she calms down, Sophie decides it makes sense that she's a witch. This explains her hats' popularity and Jane Farrier's good fortune with her count, as well as the Witch of the Waste's jealousy. She just never expected to have magic, being the eldest of three. Then, Sophie realizes *she* charmed Howl's suit to draw in women when she told it that it was made to draw in hearts while mending it. That's why Lettie looked so in love, and it must've had an effect on Miss Angorian. She must get the suit off of him.

Without Howl to surreptitiously direct her, Sophie is totally on her own. In Mrs. Pentstemmon's imposing presence, Sophie reverts somewhat to her shy, teenage self: she doesn't fully participate in the conversation, and she keeps many of her thoughts to herself. Interestingly, just as the Witch implied Sophie was charming the hats, Mrs. Pentstemmon seems to raise the possibility that Sophie charmed Howl's suit without realizing it. Again, Sophie may be more powerful than she gives herself credit for.



Mrs. Pentstemmon is framed as a trustworthy authority figure. So, it's noteworthy when she describes Howl as a force for good—it suggests that Sophie should take her seriously, rather than continuing to think of Howl as evil. However, Mrs. Pentstemmon also allows that Howl might not stay good if his contract with Calcifer remains intact. Howl and Calcifer's forced relationship, Sophie is realizing, may be their downfall—after all, that's how the Witch turned evil.



Finally, Mrs. Pentstemmon is able to voice what Sophie has been ignoring for a long time: that Sophie does have magical powers, and that she can charm things by speaking to them. Her walking stick, in this case, becomes symbolic of Sophie's growing power—it's not just the thing that keeps her upright and moving, it proves that she can change her world to suit her. Mrs. Pentstemmon also encourages Sophie to give Calcifer some grace, if her understanding of demons is correct. Essentially, she insists Calcifer isn't good or bad—he's just looking out for himself.



As Sophie accepts that she has magical powers, she realizes that her supposed destiny isn't as set in stone as she once thought. She is powerful, and she can change things—and by leaning so hard on what's supposed to happen to the eldest of three, she essentially allowed herself to feel trapped and impotent. But with great power comes great responsibility, which is why Sophie immediately jumps to needing to get Howl out of the suit she charmed. She doesn't want to be complicit in what she sees as Howl's evil, selfish ways.



When Sophie finally reaches Howl and Michael, Howl looks sad and worried—he suggests Sophie looks too unwell to speak to the King. He'll go badmouth himself another day. Sophie doesn't want to see the King, but she remembers Calcifer. If Howl is forced to go into the Waste and the Witch gets him, Sophie will never be young again. She insists on seeing the King.

Again, just as Sophie focuses on how evil and manipulative she thinks Howl is, Howl shows that he's actually quite kind and compassionate. He doesn't want to overwhelm Sophie; he'd rather she be comfortable and feel in control.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The palace is so vast and shiny that it makes Sophie dizzy just looking at it. The heat is oppressive, and Sophie feels for the soldiers and servants standing at attention. Servants move Sophie, Howl, and Michael along, asking Howl to wait about halfway to the King and then making Michael wait outside the King's chambers. When a servant ushers Sophie into the room, she's shocked to see the King in a chair, modestly dressed, and looking very ordinary. He seems awfully proud of himself—and when he asks what Sophie wants, Sophie forgets everything she's supposed to say.

The heat continues to make Sophie's job difficult: she's not as in control of her faculties as she might be otherwise. However, what's even more annoying than the heat is Sophie's surprise at seeing how ordinary the King looks. Essentially, she struggles to make her idea of the King as a grand, powerful man fit with this exceedingly normal person. Her expectations, then, keep her from being able to properly carry out Howl's instructions.



Sophie blurts out that Howl asked her to say that he won't go look for Prince Justin. The King, shocked, says Howl seemed eager earlier, but Sophie says he lied. Improvising, Sophie says Howl is a terrible coward and doesn't care about money. He's just afraid of the Witch of the Waste, since she's cursed him. The King asks Sophie to tell him more about Howl, so Sophie says he's selfish and careless, but surprisingly kind to some people. The King says he thinks of Howl as an "unprincipled, slippery rogue with a glib tongue and a clever mind." Sophie agrees—and then realizes it's odd that the King is speaking poorly of Howl. The King says her words have shown him Howl is the man to look for Justin: he's good at what he does and isn't just in it for the money.

Readers have no indication of what Sophie was supposed to say, so it's impossible to tell whether Howl's script would've actually gotten him out of working for the King. But Sophie's attempts to badmouth Howl show again how her assumptions make her less effective as she tries to accomplish tasks. Because she's so caught up in seeing what she expects to see, she misses clues that might point her in different directions. Sophie does seem to have taken Mrs. Pentstemmon's assessment of Howl seriously when she tells the King that Howl is surprisingly kind. She's becoming more comfortable accepting what she sees in front of her in this regard.



The King says he'll be frank: he needs Prince Justin back, both for his military knowledge and to squash rumors that he killed his own brother. He needs an "unscrupulous" wizard to get Justin back. He and Sophie argue about whether Howl will run away from the task, but the King remains convinced Howl will do as he's told. Firmly, the King says Howl is now the Royal Wizard and he must find Prince Justin before the end of the year. Sophie can go. Sophie shakes the King's hand and hobbles away, annoyed—this is what she gets for being the oldest.

Though Sophie was willing moments ago to say nice things about Howl, she reverts here to insisting that he's a terrible person who can't (or just won't) keep his promises. And again, she decides that she failed because she's the eldest of three. It begins to look like Sophie is trying to explain away any failure as not her fault—and unless she thinks it's convenient, she's unwilling to admit that Howl might not be all bad.



Soon, Sophie realizes she's lost in the palace. A young man comes to her rescue—the very man she gave the dueling spell to. He says his opponent is suing him, but he got Jane back. Sophie realizes he's the Count of Catterack. She explains that she lost Michael, and the count promises to send Michael to meet her at the entrance hall. Servants pass Sophie through the castle and out the entrance—but Michael and Howl aren't there. It's too hot to wait for them, so Sophie hobbles back in the direction she thinks the castle is. Soon, she's lost. When she's ready to give up, she recognizes Mrs. Pentstemmon's street and decides to go ask the footman to point her in the right direction.

But Sophie stops dead, as the Witch of the Waste is coming toward her. She looks different than she did in Market Chipping. Sophie tells herself she's not afraid; after all, Mrs. Pentstemmon said her **stick** is magic now. But as the ladies pass each other, the Witch laughs at Sophie and says that Mrs. Pentstemmon is dead. The old woman refused to tell the Witch where someone is, so the Witch killed her. Sophie is sure the Witch is looking for Howl, and she's afraid the Witch will kill her now, too. She says the Witch is evil for killing Mrs. Pentstemmon, but she didn't know the old lady and is actually on her way to see the King. She has an appointment. Laughing disbelievingly, the Witch offers to show Sophie the way to the palace.

As they walk, Sophie snatches glances at the Witch. She's supposedly an old lady, but she doesn't look old—it's not fair. Sophie asks why the Witch made her old. The Witch says Sophie was keeping her from getting information, but she got what she needed in the end. Then, the Witch asks if Sophie knows about a land called Wales. She says it's where Wizard Howl comes from. Sophie lies that she doesn't know Howl, but he's wicked. By now, they've reached the palace steps. As Sophie starts up the stairs, the Witch says to remind the King that his grandfather banished her to the Waste, so she's holding a grudge against him. Sophie hobbles to the top while the Witch waits at the bottom to see if Sophie can actually get in.

Sophie tells the guards that she forgot to tell the King something and they let her in. Before she knows it, she's back in front of the King. Sophie says the first thing that pops into her head: that Howl will look for Prince Justin if the King promises him his daughter's hand. Concerned, the King tells Sophie to let her son go, invites her to sit, and then calls for Valeria. Princess Valeria emerges from under a desk—she's only a baby, and she drools on Sophie's dress.

The vast, confusing castle makes Sophie feel even less competent and in control of her life. This may simply reflect Sophie's upbringing, however: she's used to small Market Chipping, not the opulence and extensiveness of Kingsbury or the castle. Either way, Sophie continues to gather people who function as allies. Mrs. Pentstemmon may have been wildly intimidating, but that doesn't preclude Sophie from asking for directions.



To her credit, the Witch doesn't really give Sophie any reason to make assumptions: she tells Sophie exactly what she did and what she's looking for. Then, Sophie gets an opportunity to try to evade the Witch and protect Howl. It is interesting that Sophie is suddenly so intent on protecting Howl, just like Mrs. Pentstemmon was—Sophie may now agree with Mrs. Pentstemmon that Howl is someone who doesn't deserve to fall in the Witch's clutches, or to become evil.



Just as Sophie looks elderly but isn't, the Witch looks young but is actually old. Nothing in Ingary is as it seems—but this allows people like the Witch to manipulate others. By telling the Witch that Howl is evil, Sophie draws on Howl's various rumors about his misdeeds and how terrible he is. Like everyone else in the novel, he's trying desperately to control how other people see him—and in this situation, this lie turns out to be helpful for Sophie.



Sophie, of course, enters the King's chambers with no plan—she's just trying to escape the Witch. The King's advice to let her "son" go highlights how well the King thinks of Howl. He implies that Howl is old enough to make his own choices, particularly about who he marries. Trying to essentially force Howl into another contract, he suggests, won't end well.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A four-horse carriage, complete with numerous attendants, takes Sophie to the castle's Kingsbury entrance. This is because Valeria crawled onto Sophie's lap, and remembering that the Witch had threatened the baby, Sophie told Valeria that she wouldn't let the Witch hurt her. The King heard and ordered the carriage. Michael emerges from the castle to greet Sophie, saying that Howl is very upset about Mrs. Pentstemmon. Howl steps out too and once the carriage is gone, he asks what Sophie did to the King. Sophie tells Howl and Michael about meeting the Witch. Howl laughs about being the new Royal Wizard, but he's mostly upset about Mrs. Pentstemmon. He has to attend her funeral without the Witch knowing he's there.

Michael, on the other hand, is terrified of the Witch. When he wakes up, he's concerned to discover that Howl went out without his guitar after spending hours in the bathroom, and that Calcifer doesn't know where he went. Calcifer warns Michael and Sophie to not let anyone in (since the Witch knows about all the entrances but the Porthaven one), so Michael bars the door. A half-hour later, the knob turns black-down and someone bangs at the door—and just after Michael hides, Howl bursts in, dripping wet and angry. Sophie is sure he's been with Miss Angorian. He assures Michael that he cast protective spells and asks Sophie for a hot drink. Sophie refuses and asks if Howl is going to ignore Lettie now that he's pursuing Miss Angorian. Howl makes his own drink and ignores Sophie for the rest of the morning.

Sophie works on Howl's blue and silver suit while Howl and Michael discuss moving the castle—she has to get him out of his charmed suit soon. Howl blows his nose often as he talks about wanting to close up most of the castle's entrances and relocate the moving castle, though he insists the black door stays put. Sophie sniffs—Miss Angorian is there. As the day progresses, Howl refuses to answer the door for anyone and conjures handkerchiefs for himself more and more often. His voice becomes hoarse and finally, he laments that he always gets a cold when he goes to Wales. Sophie sniffs that people who run away to go courting rather than following the King's instructions deserve colds.

That the King orders Sophie the carriage highlights how terrified everyone is of the Witch right now. Anyone who openly speaks out against her, like Sophie does here, immediately becomes an ally and someone to trust or take care of. Once Sophie gets home, though, nobody seems all that interested in what she did or didn't do for Howl. Howl is grieving and so his attention is elsewhere, but it also seems possible that Howl sent Sophie on these errands for other reasons. Put another way, perhaps the outcome of Sophie's meetings was less important to Howl than he made it seem.



Howl continues to rule life in the castle. He can come and go where and when he wants—and he expects that everyone else simply adjust to whatever it is he wants to do. This heightens Sophie's anger at him. Sophie might fear for Lettie's wellbeing if Howl is courting Lettie, but Sophie also doesn't want her sister's heart to break. So under the current circumstances, it seems better to her to try to convince Howl to stay loyal to Lettie, rather than just going along with Howl's whims. Recall too that Sophie also sees Miss Angorian as a victim, which highlights that Sophie still sees Howl as an antagonist.



Though Sophie immediately assumes that Howl wants to keep the door to Wales because of Miss Angorian, this is impossible to verify. After all, Howl's family is in Wales—and Howl has a close and loving relationship with Mari, despite his fraught relationships with Megan and Neil. Sophie may be underestimating Howl's loyalty to and love of his blood family. Looking down on him for this reason also makes her way less sympathetic when Howl comes down with a cold.



At this, Howl explains he looked for Prince Justin right after he disappeared. Justin, Howl explains, bought finding spells from him and from Mrs. Fairfax, but they were duds—and he couldn't figure out why Justin was poking around here, when he was supposedly looking for Suliman in the Waste. By now, Howl looks awful. He announces that he's going to bed and he might die; he'd like to be buried next to Mrs. Pentstemmon. Sophie turns back to the suit, realizing that Howl must've been looking for Justin when he met Lettie in Upper Folding and got distracted. When she discovers that the suit is getting smaller and smaller as she sews, Michael offers to share an enlarging spell later.

Michael spends the day running up and down the stairs, bringing Howl food and attending to his every whim. At midday, Howl sends Michael to Market Chipping for something to help move the castle; Michael puts on a cloak from the closet, which transforms him into a burly man. While Michael is gone, Howl is silent. Sophie realizes that she has the chance now to go see Lettie, but she can't find the seven-league boots in the closet—Howl must've hidden them. As Sophie is putting things back in the closet, someone thumps at the door. Calcifer worriedly says it's not the Witch or the scarecrow; it's someone alive, it wants to get in, and it doesn't mean harm. Sophie puts on the other disguise cloak to open the door, and Calcifer laughs at her.

Sophie opens the door and a massive greyhound leaps into the castle. Sophie watches cautiously as the dog stands on its hind legs—and becomes a red-headed man. Panting, he says Lettie sent him. She's unhappy and sent him to stay with Sophie. Yelping at Sophie to not tell Howl, he transforms into a red setter. Sophie asks the miserable dog-man if he was the collie at Mrs. Fairfax's house, and says she understands now. She says the Witch deserves to be punished and promises not to tell Howl. Sophie figures the dog-man is Lettie's other lover, and that Lettie sent him here so Howl's new witch could turn him back into a human. Calcifer says he can't lift the dog-man's spell himself, so Sophie tries to do it. It doesn't work; the dog just falls asleep.

Keep in mind that while Mrs. Fairfax is implied to be a less competent witch, nobody has said anything but wonderful things about Howl's magical abilities. So, it should raise suspicions that even Howl's finding spell for Prince Justin was a dud—somebody may be missing some important piece of information. Broadly speaking, Howl shares this information to impress upon Sophie that he's not a terrible person who shirks responsibility for fun. He tried, but at this point, he doesn't think he can find Justin or Suliman.



The disguise cloaks again highlight that nothing in Ingary is as it seems. By extension, this should encourage Sophie to not judge people and other beings based on her assumptions. Sophie begins to do this somewhat when she trusts Calcifer about the guest at the door. Rather than looking outside and making a snap judgment herself, she lets him give her information that guides her choice to open the door. But nothing being as it seems isn't all serious: readers don't know what Sophie's disguise cloak looks like, but Calcifer's laugh makes it clear that it's funny.



Keep in mind that the dog-man only says a few concrete things: that he came from Lettie, who's unhappy; and that he doesn't want Howl to know who he is. Everything else Sophie thinks about him is made up—and, perhaps, not entirely true. Nevertheless, it's a sign that Sophie is maturing and becoming more self-confident that she tries to lift the dog-man's spell on her own. Even though she isn't successful, she still realizes that she is powerful and should try to use her powers to help people when she can.



Upstairs, Howl begins to moan and groan dramatically. Sophie ignores him until he wails so loudly that one of Calcifer's logs rolls onto the hearth. When Sophie enters Howl's bedroom, he informs her that he's dying of boredom. Sophie finally gets a good look at his room: it's covered in dust and crawling with spiders. Howl laments pathetically that there is no cure for a cold, and he keeps ruminating on the Witch's curse. He explains that almost everything in the curse has already come true; now, he's just waiting for mermaids, the mandrake roots, and for the wind to "advance an honest mind." He won't remove his hair dye to see if his hair is white. The spell will come true in three weeks, and then the Witch will get him. But at least he'll get to go to the Rugby Club Reunion on Midsummer Eve.

Sophie asks if it's true, then, that Howl caught a falling star and can't find a "woman true and fair." She says she isn't surprised about Howl's romantic troubles; after all, Mrs. Pentstemmon said he was turning bad. Howl laments that Mrs. Pentstemmon always thought better of him than she should've, but Sophie pulls the conversation back on track and asks why Howl keeps dropping women once they love him. Howl doesn't answer. He says he keeps trying, but he made a deal years ago and can't love anyone "properly" now.

Suddenly, the dog-man enters the room and leans on Sophie, shoving her toward the window. Sophie tells Howl this is her new dog and looks out the window, which looks onto Megan's backyard and Mari swinging on a swing set. Howl laughs; he thought he could keep Sophie from snooping. Annoyed, Sophie pushes the dog out of the room and leaves, snapping that she empathizes with Megan.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Soon after Sophie returns to her sewing with the dog-man sleeping at her feet, Michael gets back with a box of items. Howl comes downstairs, wrapped in his dusty quilt, to chat with Michael and Calcifer. Michael explains he got everything they need and says there's a former hat shop for sale in Market Chipping; they could move the castle there. As Howl, Michael, and Calcifer discuss that this would entail moving Calcifer, who's technically in Porthaven, Sophie considers that Fanny is selling the shop—and how strange it is that the dog-man doesn't seem interested in biting Howl or in leaving. He even seems uninterested when Sophie suggests he return to Lettie to woo her when she gets over Howl.

Howl might not be as evil as Sophie initially thought he was, but that's not to say he isn't dramatic and selfish. He expects Sophie to somehow entertain him, and he'll make life difficult until she does. Really, it seems like Howl just wants someone to talk to him as he ruminates. The Witch's curse is clearly weighing on his mind, which makes Howl look vulnerable—someone, at least, is able to frighten Howl and make him worry for the next little while. Listening to Howl think out loud gives Sophie more insight into who Howl is when his guard is down, potentially altering her vision of him.



Howl seems to agree with Sophie that he is bad (rather than with Mrs. Pentstemmon saying he's turning bad). But he also suggests he's not entirely at fault, at least when it comes to his dealings with women: this deal he refers to keeps him from connecting with women. He's vague about what this deal is, but it's possible that he's referring to his contract with Calcifer. This may be one more way that the contract isn't helping either Howl or Calcifer.



Seeing that Howl's window looks onto Megan's backyard is an eye-opening moment for Sophie. Sure, Howl might be courting Miss Angorian in Wales—but Howl's true loyalty, it seems, is to his sister and her family. Even if he can't be there all the time for whatever reason, looking into her backyard allows him to feel present and like he's part of the family.



Moving to the hat shop in Market Chipping represents a sort of homecoming for Sophie. That the hat shop is for sale suggests that Fanny has moved on from the hat business, though Sophie gets no indication of what's going on in Fanny's life to explain this. Instead, she's intrigued more by the dog-man's behavior. That the dog-man isn't trying to bite Howl suggests to Sophie that Howl might not seem so bad to the dog-man. And the dog-man's seeming lack of interest in Lettie implies too that Sophie's earlier assumption (that the dog-man is in love with Lettie) might be incorrect.



Howl is in and out of bed the next day. Michael runs around measuring the castle and securing brackets into the corners, while Howl asks Sophie what she'd like to sell in their new shop and where she might like the castle's other entrances to open. Sophie asks that one entrance be "a nice house with lots of flowers." That afternoon, Howl puts on the cloak that turns him into a red-headed man and buys the shop. When he gets back and wonders how to pay for it, Michael suggests they use the money they'll earn from finding Prince Justin—but Howl snaps that the point is to disappear, not find the Prince. He returns to bed, sicker than ever. Oddly, the dog-man gets in Sophie's way if she tries to attend to Howl, but Sophie thinks he has the right idea.

Michael is thrilled to be moving to Market Chipping, where he can visit "[his] Lettie" every day. Howl interrupts Michael, though, by coming downstairs and asking Sophie to clean his charmed gray and scarlet suit, which he plans to wear to Mrs. Pentstemmon's funeral tomorrow. When Sophie scolds that he'll get even sicker if he goes out and Michael asks about the Witch, Howl sniffs that he'll be fine—he'll go in disguise. As soon as he's back upstairs, Sophie cuts his scarlet suit into pieces and finishes sewing the last bits of the silver and blue suit together. She asks Michael to hurry with the enlarging spell. A half-hour later, he sprinkles powder on it—and the tiny suit grows. Sophie sneaks it into Howl's room when it looks big enough, trying to tell herself that it's not still growing.

Sophie pauses to look out Howl's window. Neil is throwing a ball with a man who must be his father, but Howl interrupts Sophie's reverie to accuse her of snooping. Howl, half awake, mutters, "Teach me to keep off envy's stinging" and says that Megan is jealous. Sophie returns downstairs. The next morning, Howl comes down late—and the blue and silver suit is massive and trails up the stairs behind him. Michael tries to accept the blame, but Howl snarls that this is Sophie's work. He asks for his other suit, so Sophie pulls out the seven pieces of it. Sniffing imperiously, Howl grabs the pieces and goes into the bathroom. It takes several minutes for him to pull the entirety of the blue and silver suit in behind him.

Two hours later, Howl emerges in a black suit with his hair dyed black. Sophie can't tell which suit he's wearing. He calls the dog-man forward, tells Sophie she won't be able to find his other suit, and then instantly transforms into another red setter. He and the dog-man growl at each other for a moment, and then Howl turns back into himself. Howl is pleased: if he can deceive a dog, he'll be able to trick people at the funeral. He leaves through the Porthaven door.

Up to this point, Sophie hasn't been very involved in talks or plans to move the castle. But when Howl asks her opinion on where the castle's entrances should be, it suggests that Howl does care about Sophie. He wants to make her happy, and this is seemingly an easy way for him to do that. Michael seems to suggest using money from finding Prince Justin for purely practical reasons, but Howl takes this as an insult. This makes Howl look increasingly selfish and cowardly, at least when it comes to the prospect of facing the Witch.



Howl, as a wizard, has no reason to ask Sophie to clean his suit—he could no doubt clean it himself in moments. So, it's possible he has an ulterior motive for asking her to clean the gray and scarlet suit. Sophie, however, sees this as an opportunity to diminish the charmed suit's power and force Howl into a suit that isn't at all magic—or so she hopes. That Sophie tells herself the suit isn't still growing suggests that the suit is indeed still getting bigger. While this is humorous, it also shows how Sophie still tries to see what she wants to see, or what's convenient in the moment.



Sophie and readers don't have much backstory on why Howl and Megan's relationship is so fraught, but the fact remains that Howl spends a lot of time thinking about his relationship with his sister. Despite having a supportive chosen family in the castle, Howl seems to still wish things were better in Wales. When it comes to the massive blue and silver suit, Howl insists again that Sophie has powers she doesn't know about. In this case, Sophie may have unwittingly charmed the suit to try to keep Howl from going to the funeral—but all that seems likely to happen is that Howl will just do the magic to fix the suit himself.



Howl believes Sophie that the dog-man is a real dog, but readers and Sophie know that Howl is wrong to think this. Given how easy of a time Mrs. Fairfax had identifying the switching spell that Lettie and Martha used, it seems odd that Howl would miss such a major, important spell. He may simply be too caught up in Mrs. Pentstemmon's death to think beyond his own grief.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Hours later, Sophie begins to fry bacon on Calcifer when out of nowhere, Howl's voice shouts that the Witch found him. Throwing the frying pan, Calcifer roars into the chimney and his face begins to blur. Michael says Howl, Calcifer, and the Witch are fighting. Sophie watches Calcifer change color and shake. The blasts of magic outside make everything inside jump; the skull chatters so hard it goes in circles and the guitar twangs. Michael tries to see what's going on outside through the Porthaven window, but finally pulls out the cloaks and tosses one to Sophie. When Michael puts his cloak on, Sophie realizes why Calcifer laughed when she wore it: Michael is a horse.

In disguise, Michael, Sophie, and the dog-man step into the streets of Porthaven. With many others, they watch a huge, black cloud swirl above them. It turns into huge snakes, and then one figure races out over the sea with another in pursuit. Sophie and Michael follow other people to the docks, where they can clearly see Howl and the Witch crouched on top of clouds, creating a huge storm below them. There's a ship caught in the middle of it. Hearing a strange noise nearby, Sophie looks down—at mermaids. The first impossible part of the curse is coming true.

Howl and the Witch shoot curses at each other, trying to evade and trick the other. Howl seems victorious when he causes the Witch to fly right into the water, though the impact causes 20-foot waves to splash over the quay. Michael drags Sophie to safety as monsters burst onto the streets—they're illusions, Michael explains, and the Witch and Howl are trying to get the other to give chase. They follow a crowd of spectators all the way to the marshes, where after waiting for a while, a huge explosion sends smoke everywhere. Everything is quiet after this, so Sophie, Michael, and the dog-man return to the castle. When they reach their street, the dog-man chases a stray cat—which speaks in Howl's voice.

Howl resumes his normal shape once Sophie lets him inside. He says he didn't kill the Witch and demands that Sophie fetch the bottle of brandy. He drinks a glass himself and gives one to Calcifer. Then, he grouches that the Witch just relies on her fire demon and stays out of the way. Calcifer is angry that Howl didn't warn him about the fire demon, but Howl snaps that Calcifer knows everything he does. After a minute, Howl angrily gets up and says the Witch knows they're in Porthaven. They have to move Calcifer to Market Chipping—unless he'd rather let the Witch get him. Enraged, Calcifer disappears in the grate.

Recall that partnering with a fire demon gives a wizard more power; Howl no doubt needs Calcifer's help to match the Witch in this battle. But this is clearly a big thing to ask of Calcifer, judging by how intense his movements are (to say nothing of his emotional state). Michael seems to trust that Howl and Calcifer can take care of it, and he also doesn't seem to really fear going outside to see what's going on—the Witch and Howl's conflict, this suggests, doesn't extend to other people.



As Howl battles the Witch, the curse begins to come true. This suggests on some level that no matter how hard Howl fights the curse, it will indeed come true, slowly but surely. However, whereas Sophie simply accepts that she can't change or fix things, Howl keeps on fighting. He believes entirely in his ability to bend the world to his will and save himself and Calcifer.



The high waves hitting Porthaven suggest that there will be consequences to innocent people if Howl and the Witch continue to fight—someone, perhaps, is going to get hurt. However, the fight still seems more like a spectator event than anything else, which speaks to how normal magic (and perhaps even fights like this) are in Ingary. When Howl reappears as a stray cat, he shows again how useful disguises and trickery can be to getting his way—he just didn't count on there being a dog to complicate things.



As Howl and Calcifer bicker, readers get more insight into their contract and their relationship: at least when it comes to magic, they have few if any secrets from each other. And this causes tension, because Calcifer seems to want Howl to share things with him willingly, rather than just assuming Calcifer knows what's going on. It also becomes clear that Calcifer is vulnerable in his current state, hence the plan to move him to Market Chipping.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

While Sophie and the dog-man try to stay out of the way, Howl and Michael measure the castle, chalk a star on the floor, and repaint the four-sided doorknob (except for the black side). Sophie suggests they sell flowers in the Market Chipping shop. Soon after, Howl calls for Michael to bring him a silver shovel—it's time to move Calcifer. Howl and Calcifer remind each other that either of them could die doing this, but Howl insists they have no choice. After sprinkling a powder onto the shovel, Howl carefully scoops Calcifer up and walks into the chalked star. Sophie can see that Calcifer is just a face—but he's attached to a black lump of something. As smoke fills the room, Howl struggles to not cough and keep the shovel steady. Calcifer looks terrified.

When Howl reaches the middle of the star, he turns in a full circle. The whole room seems to turn with him, and Sophie feels just as panicky as Calcifer looks. Then, Howl returns to the fireplace and settles Calcifer back among the logs. As the smoke settles, Sophie sees the outline of the parlor of her childhood home, which the castle seems to wiggle into. Howl turns the doorknob yellow-down and opens it onto Market Chipping. With the orange side down, the door opens from an empty mansion—Calcifer says Howl told him to find a nice house. The purple side, the moving castle side, opens onto a lush field of flowers. Sophie moves forward to look, but Howl tells her to wait until tomorrow; this is the edge of the Waste.

Howl goes to bed immediately after praising Calcifer, while Michael and the dog-man fall asleep in a chair. Sophie feels odd—she's back in her childhood home, and seeing Calcifer's full shape sparks something in her memory. She asks him if he was ever a falling star. Calcifer says he was; Howl caught him. (He can talk about this because Sophie asked, but his contract forbids him from offering up this information.) Because he was so terrified of dying, he accepted Howl's contract, which would keep Calcifer alive. He notes that Howl felt sorry for him, and Sophie adds that the same thing happened to Michael. Hearing his name, Michael jerks awake and says he doesn't feel safe on the edge of the Waste. Calcifer quips that no one's safe in a wizard's house.

Again, giving Sophie the final say as to what happens with the Market Chipping shop shows that Howl truly cares for Sophie. He wants her to be happy and have a voice in what her life looks like—even in a stressful situation like this. And finally, Sophie gets a good look at Calcifer. That he's attached to the black lump is interesting, as it seems likely that it's the lump that keeps Calcifer tied to the fireplace. Figuring out what the lump is, then, becomes Sophie's goal—if she can figure out what to do with it, she can break the contract.



Getting this display of Howl and Calcifer's magical powers highlights for Sophie that Howl isn't joking around; he truly is a powerful wizard. Now that he's moved the castle to Market Chipping, however, things are going to get interesting for Sophie. She left Market Chipping to essentially figure out who she was as an old person—and now she's back home again. But since Howl is the one living in the house and running the shop, home is no longer the same. Sophie, though, isn't the same either: she knows now that she's magical and has at least some power to dictate the course of her life.



Sophie is gradually putting together the pieces and figuring out what Calcifer and Howl's contract entails. The revelation that Calcifer was once a falling star helps Sophie understand why Calcifer accepted the contract with Howl in the first place: she remembers how frightened the falling star she and Michael saw looked. So Calcifer is, on some level, very motivated by a fear of dying. This may also explain why he's so willing to help Howl thwart the Witch, as he'll suffer if the Witch catches Howl.



The next morning, Howl is out with the door set to black-side down—and none of the doors will open for Sophie. Annoyed (she wants to see the flowers), Sophie scrubs the chalk marks off the floor. Howl returns while she's scrubbing, still in a black suit but with white-blond hair. It reminds Sophie of the curse. Picking up the skull, Howl tells "Yorick" that there were mermaids, so "there is something rotten in the state of Denmark." Luckily, he says, he's very dishonest, even though his cold won't go away. Sophie exchanges a look with the dog-man, suggests he go back to Lettie, and then asks Howl how Miss Angorian is going. He says it's awful; she has "a heart like a boiled stone."

After breakfast, Howl and Michael clean out the broom cupboard and knock down the back wall so it opens into the former hat shop. Howl leads Sophie through the familiar passageway into the shop, which is now tiled in black and white. She says nothing when she realizes she's supposed to admire it. On the front of the shop, Howl has painted "H. Jenkins Fresh Flowers Daily." Then, Howl leads Sophie into the familiar backyard, which is half the size she remembers (the castle's yard takes up half). Sophie is conflicted: she can see her bedroom window but doesn't think she can get there, and she realizes Howl's window, which she can also see, doesn't look onto the yard. Howl is clearly upset; he expected Sophie to appreciate his handiwork.

Howl leads Sophie back inside and then opens the purple door. The castle stops and Sophie climbs out onto a lane that winds between bushes of flowers. This is clearly a magical place, and Sophie is delighted. Howl explains that they can cut flowers every morning and sell them in Market Chipping. He points out the Waste and warns Sophie to not get too close to it and the Witch. Then, he explains that Wizard Suliman started this garden a year ago, apparently to try to drive the Witch out of the Waste by making the Waste bloom. It offended the Witch, as she thinks of herself as the one "blooming orchid" in the Waste.

Sophie mentions that Mrs. Pentstemmon called Suliman a different name and said he came from the same place Howl did. Howl says he never knew Suliman, but he thought the flowers were a good idea and met the Witch when he came to check them out after Suliman disappeared. The castle is here now because it's the last thing the Witch would expect. But when Sophie asks if Howl is trying to find Prince Justin, Howl "slither[s]" away to yell at Michael.

Howl drops several references to Shakespeare in this passage, which makes sense given his upbringing and the education he received in contemporary Wales. Despite Howl's insistence that the curse isn't coming true, Sophie perceives that it is—especially with Howl's hair looking so fair these days. As Howl describes Miss Angorian's heart, his word choice stands out. Rather than being "heartless," like he is, she essentially has a small, shriveled heart. In this regard, then, they're entirely different.



This tour is very disconcerting for Sophie, since nothing about her childhood home has changed—except for everything. Specifically, the fact that she can't access her childhood bedroom highlights that Sophie is coming of age; she can't symbolically return to her childhood. Meanwhile, noting that Howl's window looks out on Megan's backyard highlights how connected he still is to his biological family, even as his physical location has changed. But still, Sophie and Howl fail to connect more deeply with each other, since Sophie's reaction isn't what Howl was hoping for—though this does reflect Howl's self-absorption.



It's another sign that Sophie is coming of age and is beginning to trust herself when she recognizes this landscape as a magical place. Being able to recognize magic is a skill the novel attributes to experienced magical people, such as the Witch and Mrs. Fairfax. That Wizard Suliman started the garden to drive the Witch away makes the Witch look even more cold and evil, if she'd run from something so delightful as a beautiful garden of flowers.



It humanizes Howl a bit when he says that he agrees that the flowers are a good idea. Unlike the Witch, who is cruel, selfish, unfeeling, and apparently can't stand other blooming things, Howl is willing to move his castle to the middle of a massive magical garden. He may insist this is just for practical reasons, but Sophie picks up on the possibility that Howl might be a better person than she thinks he is.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Howl is right: running the flower shop is easy. Every morning, Sophie and Michael go out the purple door to gather flowers. Michael invents a floating bathtub where they can put cut flowers, and then they fill buckets in the shop with the flowers. Two of the buckets are the seven-league boots—a clear sign, Sophie believes, that Howl isn't interested in Lettie anymore. Howl is usually away through the black door in the mornings, and he insists one must catch schoolteachers before school. He also refuses to tell Sophie which suit he's wearing; his suit is still black, so she can't tell if it's the cursed scarlet one or the blue.

Sophie and Michael mostly run the shop. In just a few days, the shop becomes very popular. Nobody recognizes Sophie. Her old neighbors even think she's Howl's mother, but she begins insisting she's his aunt. When Howl arrives in the shop (after spending hours in the bathroom), business gets even better: he convinces people to buy twice as many flowers as they intend to. Eventually this starts scaring ladies away, so Howl spends most of his time in the yard shed, working on defenses to repel the Witch. Sophie discovers that she can keep flowers alive for days if she talks to them. Pleased, she begins planting things in the yard and talking to them—she grows a navy rose, and then plants every root she can find in the castle.

Sophie tells herself she's happy, but this isn't true. Something is wrong. Maybe it's that Sophie won't visit Martha or Lettie, since she doesn't want them to see her old. Maybe it's that Michael always takes flowers to Martha, leaving Sophie alone. Other times it seems like Calcifer is the problem, since he's bored now that the castle is empty most of the time. He desperately wants to experience things outside. Sophie takes to spending an hour each morning with Calcifer, and she always assures him she's working on breaking the contract with Howl. This isn't true. Indeed, after speaking to Mrs. Pentstemmon, Sophie believes breaking the contract will kill Howl and Calcifer—and Calcifer, at least, doesn't deserve that. The dog-man's gloominess also bothers Sophie, but as Midsummer Day approaches, he sleeps more in the sunshine.

The roots Sophie planted grow increasingly interesting. One looks like it's going to become an orchid—but when it blooms, Sophie can only stare at the ugly thing. Michael observes that it looks like “a squashed-baby flower,” and Howl pulls the plant out of the pot. It's a mandrake root; Sophie, Howl snarls, is making the curse come true. All that's left is for the wind to “advance an honest mind.” As Sophie arranges flowers in the shop, she thinks that Howl will never be honest, so if the curse means *he'll* have to become honest, it'll never come true. But anyway, the curse serves Howl right for courting Miss Angorian in a charmed suit.

Though Sophie assumes Howl is no longer courting Lettie because of the repurposed boots, it's worth considering that Howl never seemed to use the seven-league boots to visit her—Sophie and Michael used them once, but Howl must have other ways of traveling long distances. Howl's caginess about which suit he's wearing suggests he may be aware of the charm in his suit, just as Mrs. Pentstemmon was—something that Sophie finds concerning.



As an elderly woman, Sophie essentially has to reinvent herself for her former friends and neighbors. At this point, it's unclear whether this bothers Sophie or whether this is a positive experience for her. However, the discovery that she can grow interesting plants by speaking to them indicates that Sophie is getting more comfortable experimenting with her powers. Further, taking every root from the castle suggests that she feels at home here and as though she can do this sort of thing—she's becoming one of the family.



The first option for why Sophie might be unhappy suggests that Sophie's happiness is contingent on having close relationships with her sisters—and in her current state, Sophie doesn't think she's physically capable of opening up to them. It stings too that Martha is busy falling in love with Michael while Sophie is stuck posing as an elderly woman. When it comes to Calcifer, Sophie is doing what she believes is going to help him the most given what she thinks is true. She values Calcifer and wants to see him survive. In her inner monologue, Sophie remains convinced that Howl is a bad person who deserves punishment—despite the fact that Howl has shown her and others immense kindness.



Mandrakes have long been associated with magic and witchcraft because the roots often resemble human forms and are hallucinogenic. Having the flower resemble a human rather than the roots may highlight Sophie's power—and this suggests that the curse on Howl has something to do with her. Sophie's mood worsens as she considers Howl, which leads her to think even less charitably about him.



Suddenly, Sophie hears a thumping sound outside. It's the scarecrow, and it looks more determined than ever. People in the street look just as afraid as Sophie feels. As it gets close to the shop, Sophie whispers over and over that it doesn't know her and should just keep going. To her surprise, it works—the scarecrow keeps hopping. That afternoon, both Howl and Michael go out. Alone in the oppressively hot shop, Sophie is miserable. She sighs that maybe it's Howl's curse, but it's more likely that being the eldest is catching up to her: she's back where she started, just old.

The dog-man sticks his snout through the door and whines. He enters the shop and sticks his paws out—he's trying to turn into a man. With Sophie's encouragement, he does. He pants that he envies Howl for being able to shapeshift so easily, and he says he was the dog Sophie rescued from the hedge. He told Lettie he knew Sophie, and he promised he'd keep watch. Just before he turns back into a dog (a sheepdog this time), he says he was here before, with the Witch. Sophie is shocked; she remembers the man with the Witch. She confirms that both the dog-man and Lettie know who she is and that she's under a spell. Then, she sends the dog-man to find someplace cool. She can't figure out why Lettie sent the dog-man, though.

Sophie goes to consult Calcifer, but he has nothing helpful to add. As they talk, the black-down doorknob clicks and opens—and Miss Angorian peeks in. She says she's looking for Howl. Sophie says he's out, wondering where he is if he's not courting Miss Angorian. As Miss Angorian approaches Sophie, she begs her not to tell Howl she was here—she explains she's only leading Howl on because she believes her fiancé, Ben, disappeared in the same place Howl keeps going. Sophie snaps that Mr. Sullivan isn't here, realizing that this is Wizard Suliman's name. She doesn't believe it.

Miss Angorian begs to look around so she can know how Ben is living, but Sophie blocks her way. As she herds Miss Angorian back to the door, Sophie answers that this place is in Market Chipping, that Howl's room is upstairs, and that the other door leads to a flower shop. Miss Angorian frowns at Calcifer, but he stares back silently. Calcifer's reaction makes Sophie feel better about being rude. Finally, Miss Angorian throws herself at Howl's guitar, which she insists belongs to Ben. She begs to keep it, but Sophie refuses and shoves Miss Angorian out the door into Wales. Turning the door orange-down, Sophie warns Calcifer to say nothing to Howl, and she snaps that Wizard Suliman probably came here to escape Miss Angorian's terrible voice.

Sophie is discovering how to harness her magic: now, it seems like she can get the scarecrow to leave her alone. However, this success isn't enough to make Sophie feel genuinely powerful. Indeed, she feels stuck and powerless—destiny, she believes, is tormenting her and making her feel terrible. Once again, she's simply accepting her fate rather than trying to change her life to make her happier.



Now, Sophie has new information that helps her see she misinterpreted the dog-man's presence before. Rather than saying anything about, for instance, his love for Lettie, he focuses on the fact that he's helping Lettie keep watch—presumably on either Sophie or Howl. It's also a revelation that Lettie knows Sophie is cursed. This suggests that Sophie isn't as alone as she thinks she is; people know she's in trouble and are trying to help her, like by sending the dog-man.



It's a big red flag that Miss Angorian is here, rather than out in Wales flirting with Howl—Howl clearly isn't doing what Sophie thought he was. However, Miss Angorian does confirm that Howl is courting her. Her story mirrors Lettie's: she insists she's loyal to someone she can't have, and is just playing along with Howl to gain information or prestige. That Miss Angorian was engaged to Wizard Suliman suggests Suliman was living a double life like Howl, with family in Wales and friends and work in Ingary.



Given that Miss Angorian is from Wales—a nonmagical place in this novel's universe—it seems odd that Miss Angorian doesn't bat an eye at Calcifer. Even Sophie, who grew up knowing that magic exists, was shocked to find him in the grate. This suggests that there's something suspicious going on with Miss Angorian, though it's not clear yet what. Sophie's worsening temper suggests that on some level, she feels territorial about Howl and doesn't appreciate having to deal with Howl's love interests parading through her home. She'd rather pretend they don't exist.



Calcifer chuckles that he's never seen anyone get rid of a guest so fast, which makes Sophie feel terrible. She goes to the bathroom and stares at her wrinkly face. But even her young face, she thinks, isn't as pretty as Miss Angorian's. Sophie returns to the shop, where she shoves ferns into a bucket and snarls at them to grow into daffodils. The dog-man and Michael both avoid her all afternoon.

This passage implies that Sophie herself is attracted to Howl—and she's upset in part because she fears she's never going to be as attractive as Miss Angorian is, and so will never win Howl's heart. That Sophie seems to finally be admitting she might be attracted to Howl suggests that she's reaching a turning point: she's becoming more willing to be honest with herself.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

Late in the afternoon, Howl saunters into the shop. Sophie glares at him and demands to know what suit he's wearing. Shrugging, Howl lifts an arm and the suit slowly changes color to reveal that it's the silver and blue one. Somehow, this makes Sophie even angrier. The dog-man pushes into the shop, and glad for a distraction, Howl observes that feeding two dogs will be a chore. Sophie snaps that this isn't a dog; it's a man under a spell. Howl pounces on the dog and asks why Sophie didn't tell him. He's clearly angry—and Sophie is glad to fight. She accuses Howl of being too self-absorbed to notice on his own. Howl yells for Michael and when Michael expresses disbelief that the dog is really a man, Howl insists Sophie is fully to blame.

Sophie's anger increases because it seems like Howl might actually just be charming—maybe he doesn't need a specially charmed suit to draw women in. Sophie, of course, kept the dog-man's secret because he asked her to, so it's interesting that she doesn't share this fact now. Her goal is simply to create an outlet for her anger, hence instigating this fight with Howl. However, Howl also doesn't contradict her when she accuses him of being too self-absorbed: the novel has already established that magical people can usually identify curses, so it follows that Howl missed this one because of his self-absorption.



Howl drags the dog-man to Calcifer and asks if Calcifer knew. Calcifer says Howl never asked. Enraged, Howl says that compared with how the Witch treats her fire demon, Calcifer is pampered—all he has to do is tell Howl this sort of thing. Now, they have to get the dog-man back to his real state. Lifting the dog up on its hind legs, Howl says the being is resisting, and Calcifer says this is the Witch's spell and it has many layers. Finally, with Calcifer's help, the dog transforms into a red-haired man with almost no personality or spark. The man says he doesn't know who he is, but Calcifer says he answered to the name Percival last.

The way that Howl speaks to Calcifer here suggests that in their relationship, Howl has most of the power—he could make Calcifer's life miserable, if he felt like it. This is a pretty threatening thing to say, and it highlights again that the contract isn't helping Calcifer or Howl. That Howl and Calcifer notes that the dog-man is resisting and that the spell has many layers suggests that one of the "layers" may in fact be the dog-man's resistance. This has profound implications for Sophie—her spell has "layers" too, and one of them may be her own belief that she's more of an old lady than a young woman.



Settled in a chair, Percival agrees that the Witch had him a while. She took his head off (Howl explains to Michael, who's aghast, that it's possible to remove a body part and keep a person alive with advanced witchcraft). Calcifer says Percival hasn't been assembled right—and he has parts from another man, too. Percival doesn't remember why the Witch took his head off. Michael asks if he was ever called Justin, but Sophie snorts and Percival says the Witch called him Gaston. Howl warns Michael to give Percival space and to not make Sophie snort—she might bring the castle down.

Michael clearly suspects that the Witch made Percival out of some of Prince Justin's body parts—which of course raises the question of what she's doing with the rest of his body. Either way, that she's engaging in this kind of experiment highlights how cruel and heartless the Witch is: she's literally remaking people to be how she'd like them to be. Howl's comment about Sophie bringing the castle down is humorous, but Sophie's snort highlights that she's still in a rage.



Angrier than ever, Sophie returns to the flower shop to find that her daffodils are now dead brown sludge in a foul-smelling poison. She shouts with frustration, which brings Howl running. He suggests she try her poison on the weeds out in front of the mansion, and Sophie agrees—she feels like killing something. Howl sends Percival with her, so Sophie and Percival step out the door of the mansion. It's a grand place, but it's in a state of disrepair. Windows are broken and the walls are mildewy. Sophie huffs to herself that Howl could at least make this place look nicer instead of playing in Wales.

Sophie shouts for Percival to pour some poison into her watering can, and he does so meekly. Sophie kills weeds until she feels a bit better, and then she asks Percival why the Witch wanted him, and why she brought Percival to the shop when she cursed Sophie. Percival explains that the Witch wanted to know about Howl. He must've known something about Howl before he became Percival, and he was trying to keep the Witch from finding out anything and cursing Howl. Percival says he kept thinking of Lettie to evade the Witch, so the Witch thought Lettie was involved. He admits he told the Witch that Lettie owned a hat shop in Market Chipping, knowing Lettie was safe in Upper Folding and not knowing Lettie had a sister.

Percival continues that the Witch tossed him out of the carriage that afternoon, and he turned into a dog in front of some farmers. They thought he was a werewolf, which is why Sophie found him with a stick. He then went to Mrs. Fairfax and Lettie, whom Howl was courting. Then, Percival says, Howl started asking about Sophie—and Lettie said that Sophie was her sister. Howl mentioned he knew an old lady named Sophie, and Mrs. Fairfax had seen Sophie as an old woman too. Lettie, Percival says, was convinced something awful had happened to Sophie and that Sophie was in danger from Howl. Percival turned into a man long enough to promise to guard Sophie. Annoyed, Sophie says she's fine, but Percival says she's not. He was too late.

Screaming in anger, Sophie dumps her weed killer and says that Howl is heartless and impossible. However, she knows something is wrong, and it has to do with not being willing to see her sisters. She reminds herself that she's a failure because she's the eldest. But uneasily, Sophie wonders if Mrs. Pentstemmon could see who—or what—she really is. Was she drawn in by Howl's charmed suit? He was wearing the silver and blue on the day they first met, but both suits seem to work the same. Suddenly, Sophie hears the thud of the scarecrow again. Crouching near Percival, who asks why Sophie wants to get rid of the scarecrow, Sophie again tells it to go away. It obeys.

Sophie is at least kind of mad at Howl, though that's not all of it (recall that she can't identify what exactly she's angry about). But now that Howl has returned Percival to his human form and let go of his anger, notice that he's no longer willing to fight with Sophie. Instead, he seems to be doing his best to channel her anger and give her some outlet to help her feel better—a sure sign that he's not as evil as Sophie thinks.



Percival helps Sophie put together some of the pieces she's missing. Interestingly, he implies that the Witch cursed Sophie believing that she was Lettie—highlighting that the Witch, while powerful, doesn't know everything. And again, Percival's almost instinctive desire to protect Howl suggests that Howl is, to put it simply, someone worth protecting. He's not an evil person who just deserves to die, as Sophie sometimes thinks. Rather, it implies that many people see Howl as being on the side of good, and as someone they should help continue to do good.



Just as Sophie was mistaken for a witch on the day she was cursed and left town, Percival was also mistaken for a mythical, potentially dangerous being. The difference, of course, is that Sophie is actually a witch, while Percival isn't a werewolf—but others' assumptions about them still guide how people interact with them. Percival's insistence that he's "too late" to guard Sophie from Howl confirms that Sophie has indeed developed feelings for Howl. She's been drawn in, and even in her elderly body, she's a love interest in her own right.



Sophie isn't willing to reconnect with her sisters, but she's not willing to say anything affirmative about her feelings for Howl—instead, as she so often does when things are emotionally difficult, she blames her current plight on destiny. And it's disturbing for her to consider that Mrs. Pentstemmon may have seen that Sophie is actually young, as this implies that perhaps others—such as Mrs. Fairfax, or even Howl—realize she's cursed. When Percival asks why Sophie wants to get rid of the scarecrow, he points out that Sophie is judging that it's evil with little evidence that she's right.



Sophie can't run away now, with the scarecrow out there, so she turns back to the mansion. Suddenly, it's gleaming and clean. She can tell Howl is trying to tempt her to go in and explore, so she goes into the castle instead. Howl and Michael are dismantling a spell—a listening spell, Sophie is sure. Sophie screams at them and asks how long Howl has known she's under a spell. Howl and Michael explain that both Letties, Mrs. Fairfax, Calcifer, and Mrs. Pentstemmon told them. But neither Howl nor Mrs. Pentstemmon could lift it, since Sophie is doing it to herself. As Percival steps inside with the bucket of poison, Sophie grabs it and hurls it at Michael and Howl. It crashes into the sink.

Howl fishes the skull out of the sink; it's now gleaming white instead of dirty brown. Sophie settles in her chair to sulk as Howl asks if Sophie hasn't noticed that her aches and pains have been better—he can't lift the spell, but he's been trying to help. Percival begins tuning Howl's guitar and says the Witch wanted to know about Wales. Howl disappears into the bathroom as Percival plays, and he emerges hours later. He reminds everyone that it'll be Midsummer Day at midnight, so they should all be careful. Sophie continues to ignore him angrily, so Howl sighs and goes out into Wales. Sophie vows to leave tomorrow, no matter what.

CHAPTER TWENTY

At dawn on Midsummer Day, Howl crashes into the castle, bellowing a silly song that Calcifer usually sings. Clearly drunk, he slurs about attending a Rugby Club Reunion and recites lines from the curse the Witch put on him. Calcifer tells him to go to bed, and after running into several walls, Howl obeys. He makes so much noise, though, that Percival and Michael wake up—so Sophie can't slip away. Instead, she goes outside with them to collect flowers for Midsummer garlands. Really, Sophie is glad to see the flowers one last time, and she's sad to be going.

As Percival works, he says Howl made this garden much better; he remembers being here before. Michael is excited—he still thinks Percival might be Prince Justin—but Percival doesn't remember enough to say for sure when he was here. Making the garlands is hard work, mostly because Michael is too busy trying to get information out of Percival for either man to work. Sophie does notice that Percival seems to be expecting something; maybe he is still beholden to the Witch. As Sophie makes most of the garlands—something Howl could do with a wave of a hand, if he wasn't asleep—she grows angry and decides for sure that she won't help Howl defeat the Witch.

It feels like a huge betrayal to Sophie to learn that pretty much everyone in her life knew she's under a spell—but have let her go on pretending she's actually elderly. As an elderly person, Sophie got to reinvent herself and experiment with being silly and bold. It's unsettling, then, to realize that people knew who she was, and that she's genuinely capable of acting that way. And Howl's insistence that Sophie is keeping herself cursed supports the idea that one of the curse's "layers" is Sophie's belief in destiny. She must reevaluate how she thinks about destiny if she wants to return to her teenage body.



Sophie remains too emotional to see or accept that Howl hasn't been cruel to her. He hasn't been honest about what he knows (that she's under a spell), but he's tried to make Sophie feel welcome and has tried to help make her body more comfortable. It seems cathartic for Percival to have told Sophie everything he knows, offering some hope that Sophie may soon experience catharsis of her own, once she puts the rest of the pieces together about herself and her place in the world.



Drunk, Howl is going to be a much less effective wizard—a problem, given that today, Midsummer Day, is supposedly when the Witch's curse will catch up to him. Though Sophie wants to disappear, it's significant that she's not mad about having to delay her departure. On some level, she doesn't want to go. This suggests that Sophie feels like part of the family in the moving castle, and doesn't want to give up the relationships she's built.



Despite Sophie's earlier insistence that she's going to leave today, she continues to go back and forth. She makes it seem here like she does want to help Howl, in much the same way he's tried to help her—something that would mean she'd need to stick around. However, Sophie still reads Howl's need to sleep off his hangover as unattractive selfishness, so there seems to be even less reason to stay. Howl seems, in this instance, to be unworthy of her help or her company.



Michael, Sophie, and Percival open the shop and deal with the first rush. It's a chilly day, but people are still out in droves, buying flowers and celebrating. Around midday, Sophie finally steals away to pack her things. She brushes off Calcifer asking to chat and is about to leave when someone knocks at the mansion door. Calcifer says it's safe, so Sophie opens it. A footman announces that a Mrs. Sacheverell Smith is here—and when the woman enters, it's Fanny, wearing a hat Sophie trimmed. Sophie had told the hat to marry money—and Fanny obviously did. It takes Fanny a moment, but she recognizes Sophie and throws her arms around her, sobbing. She cries that nobody knew where Sophie was, and now Sophie is a servant instead of living with Fanny and Mr. Smith.

By now, Sophie is crying too, and she and Fanny start to laugh. Sophie starts to explain what happened and says that Wizard Howl took her in. At this, Fanny picks up her parasol and threatens to stab Howl with it if he did this to Sophie. Sophie says, truthfully, that Howl has been kind. Both Calcifer and Fanny look at her with interest as Sophie says that she's never seen Howl do anything evil—and he doesn't eat girls' hearts. Fanny says that Sophie has always been good at reforming people, like Lettie and Martha when they were small and selfish. But she should've told Fanny where she was. Sophie feels terrible now for believing Martha; she knows Fanny is a good person.

Fanny tells Sophie all about Mr. Smith. Now that she's old, Sophie has a new perspective on Fanny: Fanny is young, beautiful, did the best she could for her daughters, and was probably also bored with the hat shop. Suddenly, Michael bursts in with Martha and says they've closed the flower shop. Martha hugs both Sophie and Fanny, and moments later, Lettie and Mrs. Fairfax enter with a picnic. Percival follows them in. Everyone hugs and shouts; Sophie is shocked Howl sleeps through it.

Sophie notices that Lettie seems very taken with Percival; she clings to his arm like she owns him. He seems just as taken with her. Lettie explains to Sophie how Percival kept switching between his human and dog forms at first, and she affirms that she also met Prince Justin when he passed through to buy finding spells. He was very annoyed, Lettie says, because his finding spells kept saying Wizard Suliman was between Upper Folding and Market Chipping. He also kept flirting with her.

Once again, just as Sophie prepares to leave the moving castle, something or someone gets in her way to keep her from going. It's significant that this time, that person is Fanny—Sophie's stepmother and the woman who raised her. This reunion is taking place in Sophie's childhood home, after all, so it represents a sort of marriage of Sophie's old life with her new life. Then, it's significant that Fanny isn't angry with Sophie, and indeed, recognizes Sophie at all. Sophie was perhaps wrong to think Fanny would be upset with her; Fanny simply seems like she was worried.



Now that Sophie is faced with a close family member, she's able to voice how she really feels about Howl: he is actually kind, trustworthy, and generous. Fanny attributes Sophie's view of Howl to the fact that Sophie is good at teaching people morals, but it seems like this isn't it—Howl has always been kind. And finally, Sophie has to confront how her own assumptions about Fanny led her to reject her family members. She can heal this rift, but she knows now that she can't take things, like what Martha said about Fanny being exploitative, at face value.



Sophie's new perspective helps her empathize with her stepmother. As she told Martha on May Day, Fanny worked very hard to raise three girls and deserves to have some fun—and now she's getting that, thanks to Sophie's charmed hat. As the rest of the family pours in (and as nobody says anything about the curse), Sophie discovers that her family will always love and support her.



Lettie offers more insight into what was going on with Prince Justin's finding spells, which Howl described earlier as "duds." No one seems to consider that perhaps the spells weren't wrong, though it's not yet clear where Wizard Suliman is or was. But their assumptions that Suliman couldn't possibly be between Upper Folding and Market Chipping blind them to any other possibilities.



As Sophie tries to coax Calcifer to come up and say hello to Lettie, Miss Angorian enters. Ashamed of how rudely she treated Miss Angorian last time, and knowing she was only rude because Howl is courting her, Sophie decides to invite her in. Miss Angorian is clearly an outsider—everyone else knows one another. Soon she looks ready to leave, so Sophie offers to wake Howl up. Miss Angorian says she'll just look around outside. Somehow, the door has been turned to purple-down, the field of flowers, but Sophie figures this is because of Howl's magic defenses against the Witch. She allows Miss Angorian to peruse the flowers.

Fanny is terrified when she sees flowers and not her carriage outside the door, so Sophie demonstrates how the door works. Suddenly, Calcifer roars to life and shouts that the Witch found Megan's family. Howl races downstairs immediately and out into Wales, while Sophie hobbles upstairs to see what's happening. Everyone follows Sophie. From the window, Sophie watches the Witch hold out her arms to Mari and Neil, who don't seem to want to approach but act like they have no choice. Megan is behind them, clearly cursing at the Witch. Howl appears on the lawn moments later and charges for the Witch, chasing her over the fence and out of sight.

Disgusted by Howl's dirty room, Fanny and Mrs. Fairfax decide to clean it. Before they can get started, Michael invites everyone to go inspect the mansion—but Lettie opens the door purple-down, onto the flowers. The scarecrow is in the doorway. Sophie is terrified; Miss Angorian is out there somewhere, possibly dead. Inside, the skull starts chattering and the guitar makes odd twangs. Calcifer tells Sophie the scarecrow is saying it means no harm and wants to come in. He believes it. Sophie trusts Calcifer, and the scarecrow really isn't so frightening. Indeed, fearing it was just an excuse for Sophie to not leave the castle. Now, though, she has to leave, since Howl prefers Miss Angorian to Sophie.

Sophie invites the scarecrow in. It looks around and falls toward the skull in Michael's hands—and with a magical fizz, the skull enters the turnip head. The scarecrow says it can speak now, and Mrs. Fairfax explains that this is just a magician's golem. Percival faints and Lettie runs to him, but the scarecrow approaches Percival—and says Percival is one of "the parts" he's supposed to find. It thanks Sophie for talking life into him, and then it thanks Lettie and Mrs. Fairfax. Sophie asks what the scarecrow is supposed to do, but Calcifer tells Sophie not to pester the being. Suddenly, the Witch's voice booms through the castle, saying that she tricked Howl and has Lily Angorian in the Waste. Howl has to come get her himself. As the scarecrow hops away, Michael shouts that the Witch sent the scarecrow so she could infiltrate the castle.

It's a sign that Sophie is finally accepting that she cares for Howl when she lets Miss Angorian in. Despite finding Howl obnoxious at times, Sophie wants him to be happy—so she reasons that if Miss Angorian will make him happy, she should be nice to her. From the moment she enters the castle, though, Miss Angorian doesn't fit in. In this situation, this is attributed to her not being part of Sophie's family—or indeed, part of Howl's chosen family at all.



Howl's immediate reaction upon learning that the Witch is hurting his family is telling. Whatever Megan might think, Howl does care about her and her children—and he's willing to risk his life to protect them, despite their difficult relationship. That Sophie insists on watching Howl do this suggests a level of intimacy between Sophie and Howl, as Howl has made it very clear he doesn't want Sophie in his room or really knowing anything about his family.



Fanny and Mrs. Fairfax's choice to clean Howl's room lends some humor to a tense situation, but the scarecrow's arrival just creates more tension. However, it also causes Sophie to reevaluate her preconceptions: she trusts Calcifer, so if Calcifer says the scarecrow isn't dangerous, Sophie is now willing to believe him. And she's becoming more introspective about her past actions as well. Now, she's willing to consider that she loves Howl and has acted in certain ways so she can stay around him—and because she loves him, she reasons she must let him pursue Miss Angorian.



Once Sophie stops to think before judging the scarecrow, things begin to fall into place. The scarecrow initially seems like it's on the side of good; if it's looking for "parts," the implication is that it's working against the witch to possibly undo whatever she's done with regards to assembling Percival. Additionally, the scarecrow confirms that Sophie "talked life" into it, highlighting that Sophie has been powerful for some time now and just didn't know it. And Calcifer, at least, has empathy for the scarecrow. Further, Sophie trusts Calcifer, so it seems more likely that the scarecrow isn't actually evil.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Everyone but Sophie chases the scarecrow. Sophie grabs her **stick** and runs into the shop, muttering that Howl won't forgive her for letting Miss Angorian fall into the Witch's hands. Emptying the seven-league boots of flowers and putting them on, Sophie begins to zip through the countryside, passing the mansion and Kingsbury. She finally reaches the Waste and can see the edge, where the flowers and the castle are. She continues into the Waste, feeling sorry for the Witch: it's an ugly place and is unbearably hot. Finally, Sophie finds a fortress with odd towers, seemingly made out of the Waste's sand. Sophie recognizes the building style: like the moving castle, this was built by a fire demon.

The Witch's two page boys come out to meet Sophie. One leads her inside and the door closes behind Sophie. They enter a strip of nothingness, and then the fortress seems to be made of pillars or chimneys. The Witch is waiting in the middle of an open area, though now she's tall, skinny, and blond. She backs away when Sophie brandishes her **stick**, but then the Witch waves her hands. The page boys turn into sticky blobs that fly to Sophie and glue her to the wall. Sophie begs for the Witch to let Miss Angorian go, but the Witch says they must wait for Howl. The curse is working, now that Sophie has come: Howl will have to be honest.

The Witch beckons and a throne of sorts moves into the room. There's a man on it, but he has no head—and the body is Prince Justin's. Sophie says the man looks terrible, but the Witch explains that they're waiting for Howl's head to make a perfect man. This body is made of Prince Justin and Wizard Suliman's body parts; Wizard Suliman's skull is out with his guitar, and Prince Justin's head is somewhere "with the other leftover parts." Once she's done making this man, he'll be King of Ingary and she'll be Queen. When Sophie insists Howl will somehow evade the Witch, the Witch says she'll make him obey because she'll control Calcifer. Sophie waves her **stick**, so the Witch snaps that she's worked very hard to lure everyone out here. She's tired of Sophie causing trouble.

Now that the situation has gotten dire, Sophie is finally willing to face up to the fact that she has feelings for Howl. She wants him to be happy, and as she understands it, this means that she must protect Miss Angorian from harm so she and Howl can continue their romance. As Sophie feels some compassion for the Witch, she herself continues to come of age. She's now able to look at the Witch with a more nuanced, understanding view. She undoubtedly still thinks the Witch is doing terrible things, but she can also admit to herself that the Witch isn't a happy, fulfilled person.



Having spent about a month in Howl and Calcifer's castle, Sophie isn't surprised by any of the magical things she sees in the Witch's fortress. Indeed, Sophie now realizes that she too can perform magic, which is why she waves her stick at the Witch. But Sophie isn't confident or skilled enough to actually best the Witch, suggesting she has a way to go in accepting her power. It's odd that the Witch says the curse is working because Sophie has arrived—the curse, it seems, has to do with Sophie.



The Witch's ultimate plan, it seems, is more about gaining political power than it is about Howl: Howl is just a tool the Witch needs to gain power. She as much as confirms that Percival is indeed made of some of Prince Justin's body parts, and she also confirms that the skull Howl has is Wizard Suliman's. Sophie, however, now sees that Howl's "slithery" nature might help him: if he can keep away from the Witch, the Witch won't succeed. Of course, it's impossible to tell at this point whether the curse—and Howl's destiny—will come to pass, or whether Howl can exert much influence over what happens next.



The Witch wanders away. Sophie thinks the Witch is losing her mind. She begins to try to unstick herself by waving her **stick** at the orange stuff, and it starts to work. Suddenly, the wall of the fortress blasts open and the scarecrow bursts in. The scarecrow and the Witch leap at each other and fight. A few minutes later, Howl leaps through the hole in the wall. He shouts one long word, and this seems to slowly dissolve the fortress's magic. The Witch folds in on herself and dies, leaving only a pile of bones. The scarecrow begins to dig through the bones, but Howl says the Witch's heart won't be there. Her fire demon has it, and the demon has probably been in charge for some time.

Finally freeing herself, Sophie puts her shawl over Prince Justin's shoulders. Howl scolds Sophie for cleaning up, and Sophie notices that he hasn't shaved, brushed his hair, or fixed his suit—he must really love Miss Angorian. Sophie says she came to save Miss Angorian, but Howl cuts her off and scoffs that he thought Sophie might stay put if her family came to visit. The scarecrow begins answering Sophie's questions from earlier: it belonged to Wizard Suliman. Wizard Suliman talked life into it and asked it to find all his body parts, but the scarecrow was dying when Sophie saved it by talking life into it. Sophie confirms that Prince Justin's finding spells were pointing to the scarecrow, and the scarecrow says that Percival is made of Prince Justin and Wizard Suliman.

Howl tells the scarecrow to bring the body to the castle; he'll help later. Then, he says he and Sophie have to get home before the Witch's fire demon gets there—and the fire demon, he says, is Miss Angorian. Sophie admits that Miss Angorian has already been in the castle, and she's touched the guitar. Groaning, Howl tells Sophie to run. He'll need to "raise a wind." Howl runs beside Sophie and wind swirls around them, carrying them over the Waste.

As they run, Sophie tries to defend Calcifer (since he said nothing about the Witch's fire demon), but Howl says he expected that—Calcifer, not Wales, is his "weakest flank." He explains he baited the Witch with Wales so he could get close to her and rescue Prince Justin, and he admits that the only way he can get himself to do scary things is to pretend he won't do them. Howl is being honest, and he and Sophie are running in a wind: the curse is coming true. Bawling, Howl admits that he was betting on Suliman being alive, but when Percival turned up, he was so afraid he got drunk. And now, he spits, Sophie played right into the Witch's trap.

Both Sophie and Howl demonstrate their magical powers in this passage. Sophie is discovering that she can change things to help herself, and Howl's ability to so easily dissolve the Witch paints him as strong and competent—and possibly capable of evading the curse, if the Witch is now dead. However, the note that the Witch's fire demon has her heart calls this into question, especially if the fire demon is in charge: the demon may be the one cursing Howl. Additionally, this is another clue about what Howl and Calcifer's contract looks like (recall that the Witch and Howl have similar curses with their fire demons). So it follows that Calcifer has Howl's heart.



Calcifer and Michael noted earlier that they'll believe Howl is truly in love when he doesn't spend hours in the bathroom before seeing a woman. Sophie sees that they're right: Howl clearly hasn't done any primping, so he must be in love. Though who he's in love with is up for debate; Howl seems surprisingly unconcerned about Miss Angorian if he's in love with her. Indeed, he seems to care more about Sophie if he was trying to keep her at home, though he doesn't yet explain his reasoning. But it does perhaps suggest that Howl realizes how important Sophie's family is to her and wanted to reunite the Hatters for Sophie's sake.



It's unclear how long Howl has known Miss Angorian is actually a fire demon, but what is clear is that Sophie and Howl aren't trying to rescue her. Instead, Howl almost certainly came to the Waste to rescue Sophie. It's telling that Sophie instantly trusts Howl on this and shares what information she has about Miss Angorian—their relationship continues to strengthen.



Calcifer, Howl acknowledges, isn't entirely trustworthy: his loyalties, in some cases, lie elsewhere. Though Sophie and Howl both believe the Witch's curse is a bad thing, that Howl is now being honest about everything causes Sophie to trust him more—offering hope that this may still end well. And it also humanizes Howl when he admits to being afraid. Fear makes him far more sympathetic than what Sophie thought was going on: selfishness and arrogance.



Sophie says she's destined to fail because she's the eldest, but Howl snaps that she just never thinks—and she's too nice. Howl says he thought Sophie would be too jealous to let the Witch's demon inside. By now, they're in front of the castle, and they burst inside. Everything seems normal until Howl leaps for the guitar—and it explodes to reveal Miss Angorian. Howl says the Witch is dead, but Miss Angorian says she doesn't care. She's making herself a new, better human, and she can get at Howl's heart now. With this, she plucks Calcifer out of the grate. Calcifer begs for help, but Miss Angorian says they're going to control her new human together.

Miss Angorian squeezes, causing both Calcifer and Howl to scream in agony. Howl faints, and Miss Angorian suggests he's faking. But Calcifer screeches that Howl isn't faking; his heart is soft. Thinking before she acts, Sophie tells her **stick** to beat only Miss Angorian and to hurt no one else. She hits Miss Angorian's knuckles with the stick. Calcifer falls to the floor—and the stick continues to hit Miss Angorian while Sophie scoops up Calcifer. The dark lump Sophie is holding is Howl's heart; he gave it to Calcifer as part of the contract. It's keeping Calcifer alive.

Miss Angorian runs for the door, but Sophie shouts for everyone else to block it. Even Percival leaps up and opens the door—and outside, the scarecrow, with Prince Justin's body over its shoulders, fits itself into the doorway. By now, Sophie's **stick** is flaming and Miss Angorian pulls Michael in front of her, so the stick stops hitting (it can't hit Michael). Sophie asks Calcifer if breaking the contract will kill him. Calcifer says if Sophie breaks the contract, it won't—she can talk life into things. She tells Calcifer to have another thousand years and plucks him off the black lump. He swirls away, shouts that he's free, and flies up the chimney.

Kneeling beside Howl, Sophie puts the black lump on his chest, pushes, and tells the heart to work. Her hair—now red and long—gets in her way, and soon, the heart is in and Howl stirs. Howl says he's drunk and has to go rescue Sophie, but Sophie says she's here. Howl instead has to do something about Miss Angorian, who is trying to burn Martha and the scarecrow with Sophie's burning **stick**. Howl speaks more odd words and after a clap of thunder, the stick is gone, and he's holding what looks like a bit of cinder. He refuses to give it back to Miss Angorian, says she was going to take his heart and let Calcifer die, and then crumbles the Witch's heart. Miss Angorian disappears.

Suggesting that Sophie would be too jealous to let Miss Angorian in highlights that Howl knows Sophie loves him. He also insists that what's held Sophie back thus far is her belief that she's destined to fail—she does have the power to change things, if only she believes in herself. When Miss Angorian snatches Calcifer out of the grate after saying she can get at Howl's heart, it confirms that Calcifer is attached to Howl's heart. This helps explain why Calcifer has so often described Howl as "heartless": Howl's heart is literally not in his body.



As the being who's had the closest access to Howl's heart for the last several years, Calcifer is the authority on the state of Howl's heart. Howl is, according to Calcifer, not proverbially heartless at all; he just hasn't been able to love anyone because Calcifer has had his heart. Sophie now realizes that she can and should take Howl seriously, so she takes his advice and thinks before she acts. In other words, she now believes she can thwart destiny—and so she can.



All of Sophie's friends and family members demonstrate their loyalty to Sophie, Howl, and Calcifer by heeding Sophie's request to block the door. And finally, Sophie discovers just how special her particular magic gift makes her: she's the only person who can give Calcifer life without tying him to a person's heart. Broadly speaking, as Sophie frees Calcifer, she experiences success—so in a sense, she has thwarted her destiny. She's no longer a failure, as now she's helped someone else.



Finally, Sophie's curse lifts—though it's not clear if this is Calcifer's doing, or whether Sophie finally allowed the curse to lift by believing in herself, or whether it's a combination of the two. By getting rid of Sophie's stick, Howl brings about Sophie's coming of age: she no longer needs a mobility aid, or a proxy for her power, to believe in herself and do things. The Witch's crumbly heart contrasts greatly with Howl's soft heart, and it shows the consequences of being in such a contract with a fire demon for so long.



Once Miss Angorian is gone, the scarecrow disappears—and there are two smiling men outside. Howl ignores this, turns to Sophie, and says he's never thought gray clothes suited her. Sophie apologizes for breaking his contract with Calcifer, but Howl says he and Calcifer both hoped Sophie would break it—they didn't want to end up like the Witch. Sophie studies Howl. He looks pretty much the same, except his eyes look more alive now. Sophie is too busy to notice Prince Justin and Wizard Suliman shake hands, or see Prince Justin try to address Fanny as "the lady of the house." Mrs. Fairfax beams that that'll be Sophie soon.

As Sophie and Howl discuss their first meeting on May Day, Wizard Suliman approaches Lettie and asks to take her on as a student. Howl suggests he and Sophie live "happily ever after," totally ignoring everyone trying to talk to him and Sophie. They hold hands and stare at each other, smiling—and only look away when Michael shouts that Calcifer came back. Calcifer says he doesn't mind staying, as long as he can leave. Besides, it's raining.

Now that Sophie is back to her true form and believes that she's capable of fighting for her own happiness, she can finally enjoy the one thing she's wanted for some time: Howl's love. And now that Howl has his heart back, he's able to genuinely love Sophie back. Despite how much of the curse came true, Howl still ended up evading it—the line "Go and catch a falling star" maintains that a faithful woman doesn't exist. But now, Sophie and Howl appear ready to commit to each other faithfully for life, if Mrs. Fairfax is correct that the two will get married.



There's one fairy tale trope that Howl and Sophie are willing to accept and enjoy: their "happily ever after" ending. When Calcifer returns, it highlights the novel's insistence that Calcifer and Howl's relationship can improve, once they're no longer obligated to each other. Now, Calcifer can choose to stick around (just as Sophie also chooses to stay), and this choice, the novel suggests, makes all the difference.





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