

# The Girl Who Drank the Moon



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KELLY BARNHILL

Kelly Barnhill grew up in Minneapolis and studied creative writing at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota. She has held a variety of jobs throughout her life, including janitor, park ranger, bartender, and a middle and high school teacher. Her husband, Ted Barnhill, is an architect who designs sustainable houses, and the two have three children. Barnhill began writing short stories after the birth of her second child, and since then has had her stories published in a variety of collections and magazines. She's also written a number of children's novels and a series of nonfiction reference books for children, including *Sewers and the Rats that Love Them* and *The Bloody Book of Blood*. Her work has received numerous prizes; *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* won the 2017 Newbery Medal. Barnhill still lives in Minnesota, where she teaches writing to adults and children.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In interviews, Barnhill has said that *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* was inspired in part by the media coverage following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, during which time she noticed that journalism in general was forced to reckon with internalized bias in reporting. Of special interest to her is the way that stories can be used to alter or manipulate what people think of as true, something that is also relevant to the rise and the growing role of social media in the 21st century. Though *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* was written before the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Barnhill has also eluded to similarities between the role of stories her novel and the way that media in general, including social media, played into the outcome of this election.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

All of Barnhill's young adult novels are fantastical like *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*. They include *The Witch's Boy*, *The Unlicensed Magician*, and *The Mostly True Story of Jack*. While much darker, Lois Lowry's [Messenger](#) features a similarly ominous forest and a teen who must save his village by discovering his own power. *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* focuses heavily on the importance and complexity of familial relationships, which is a common theme in other young adult novels such as Erin Entrada Kelly's *Hello Universe* and *The Land of Forgotten Girls*. Barnhill's books have been praised for their strong female characters in particular. Other young adult or children's novels with no-nonsense, self-sufficient female

characters like Luna and Xan include *Ella Enchanted* by Gail Carson Levine, [A Wrinkle in Time](#) by Madeleine L'Engle, and Tamora Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* series.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Girl Who Drank the Moon
- **When Written:** 2015
- **Where Written:** Minneapolis, Minnesota
- **When Published:** 2016
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult, Fantasy
- **Setting:** The forest, the Protectorate, and the Free Cities surrounding the Bog
- **Climax:** The volcano explodes, and Luna protects everyone using her magic and with the help of Xan and Adara.
- **Antagonist:** Sister Ignatia/The Sorrow Eater, Grand Elder Gherland
- **Point of View:** Third Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Girl Power.** As a teen, Barnhill protested at a Honeywell plant in Minneapolis (Honeywell has contracts with the U.S. military). She protested with a group of nuns, of whom she was awe because they seemed to terrify the police officers who arrested them and Barnhill. She has said that this experience is one of the biggest influences on her female characters.

**A Captive Audience.** Barnhill often thinks and writes out loud—often with her family's dog and guinea pig as her audience.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Throughout the novel, an unnamed parent tells their child about the history of the Protectorate and the Day of Sacrifice. The parent lost a baby to the sacrifice years ago, and they say that an evil **Witch** demands an infant every year. Long ago, the Witch forced dragons to make the volcano explode, and killed a wizard. She poisoned the forest and the Bog that was once life-giving. According to the parent, it's pointless to stand up to the Witch.

In the novel's present, young Antain, an Elder-in-Training, is participating in his first Day of Sacrifice. It's horrific: the mother refuses to hand over her baby, and Antain's uncle Gherland doesn't even stay in the woods to make sure that the Witch gets the baby. The narrator says that this is because, as far as

Gherland is concerned, there is no Witch. The Witch is a convenient narrative to keep the population sad and under control. But unbeknownst to Gherland, a kindly witch named Xan has been saving abandoned babies for the past 500 years. She doesn't ask why their mothers abandon them, but she feels it's her responsibility to rescue them. Xan takes them to the Free Cities after feeding them on starlight, which is why they're called Star Children. This year, Xan discovers a baby with a crescent moon birthmark. She takes her time traveling with the baby, and after 10 days accidentally feeds the baby moonlight. This enmagicks the baby. Xan knows this means she can't leave the baby with anyone else, so she names her Luna and decides to keep her. At home, the swamp monster Glerk isn't impressed while the dragonling Fyrian is ecstatic. Fyrian is the size of a dove, but he believes that he's a Simply Enormous Dragon and lives in the land of the giants.

Glerk and Xan watch closely as Luna grows, as they know that her magic is going to burst at some point. They know that there's something they should remember and that sorrow is dangerous, but they don't know why. When Luna turns five, her magic erupts. Luna has no idea what she's doing and Xan can't teach her. Xan also grows weaker and weaker. Finally, Xan places Luna in a cocoon and returns to the old castle to reconnect to her memories of Zosimos, her mentor. After nine days of study, she comes up with a spell to encase Luna's magic in a small grain in her brain, turning her into a compliant student of magic. It will open when Luna turns 13, at which point Xan will die. When Luna wakes up, she feels different. She goes into trances whenever she sees or hears anything to do with magic, which disturbs Xan. However, Xan tells herself that Luna will be fine and that it's too sad and dangerous to think about what might happen in the future.

Meanwhile in the Protectorate, Antain remains haunted by seeing the madwoman's baby taken. He goes to visit Sister Ignatia, the head of the Sisters of the Star. She allows him to visit the madwoman, whose cell is filled with **paper birds** and maps that say, "she is here." Antain is terrified, and the madwoman's birds attack him. His face scars horribly and he resigns from the Council of Elders. Though he loves his job as a carpenter, Antain feels as though he lost something important. His prestige grows, but he continually walks past the Tower and thinks of the madwoman. One day, he speaks to Sister Ignatia. He thinks that she looks oddly content until Sister Ignatia asks him to help Ethyne, a former Sister, move out of the Tower—she broke tradition and decided to leave the Sisterhood. Ethyne is the only person who looks Antain in the face without flinching, and Antain feels hopeful.

Meanwhile, the madwoman can't remember her own name, but she doesn't see the point in remembering anyway. She knows that she's mad, but also that her madness has allowed her to discover magic and conjure paper out of the bends in the universe. She feels horrible for hurting Antain, but she watches

him closely. Because of her magic, the madwoman now knows where the Witch lives. She draws maps leading into the forest and one day, Antain catches one.

As Luna grows, she experiences headaches and dizzy spells. Xan visits the Free Cities twice per year but she only takes Luna once per year, something that annoys Luna. Luna begins to realize that Fyrian never seems to get any older. One morning as Luna muses about Fyrian, she has a flash of a memory of a woman with black hair. Fyrian calls to her and she comes to, crying. She lies that she's just thinking about how much she loves her family. Meanwhile, as Xan rescues another abandoned baby, Antain steps in her path. Antain is now married to Ethyne and is now filled with hope, so he suspects that he can reason with the Witch.

Later that year, Xan takes Luna to the Free Cities. Xan's health is clearly deteriorating, but she insists that it's not. On the trip, Luna sits with Star Children and tells them about her memories of a woman with black hair. Xan insists that they're not true, but neither Xan nor Luna will talk about the truth. Luna begins to experiment with telling stories about a girl who can't remember things and a grandmother who lies. One night, she and Fyrian fall asleep. When Luna wakes up with a burn on her thigh from Fyrian's snout, she tells him to get out. Fyrian finds himself in a strange place and though he tells himself that his feet always stomp and his wings always blow leaves off of trees, he knows that this is odd. He finds a pair of tiny boots and then hears growling. He remembers Xan telling him to call for her if he needs help. Calling for Xan doesn't help, so he calls for Luna. Fyrian finds himself back in Luna's bed. In the morning, Luna discovers a pair of mysterious boots. They make her head hurt, so she throws them in her trunk and decides to ask Glerk about them. By the time she gets outside, she forgets about the boots.

Luna leaves Xan a note and goes up the hill to draw. A crow follows her and Luna remembers that somehow, she created the crow yesterday. Fyrian sneakily tags along and falls asleep while Luna goes into a trance and draws. She wakes up after noon and runs back home, feeling as though everything is strange. Xan is still in bed. Luna discovers that she drew a detailed map of how to get to the Protectorate. At the same time, Antain tricks the Council into letting him speak. He insists that since Ethyne is pregnant and their baby will be the next one sacrificed, he's going to go into the forest and kill the Witch. Luna wakes up with a pounding headache and walks to a large stone. It lets her into a workshop where paper swirls around her. She's able to read the word "magic," and the papers tell her about how, 500 years ago, magicians enmagicked a child. That child and Zosimos tried to fight someone called the Sorrow Eater, but Zosimos died. The papers tell Luna that the child in question was Xan. In the Protectorate, Sister Ignatia assures Gherland that she'll go into the forest to kill Antain herself—the Witch must kill him. She seems to taste Gherland's sorrow with pleasure.

Xan wants to explain everything to Luna, but she knows she can't. Knowing that there's an abandoned baby waiting for her, Xan leaves Luna a note and turns herself into a swallow to fly to the Protectorate. Luna discovers the note later, and doesn't finish reading it before tearing it up and heading into the forest with the crow, though a scrap of paper from the note crawls into her pocket. The madwoman watches Antain step into the forest and thinks that it's too dangerous for Antain to go alone—the Witch lives in the Tower and will follow him. She turns the bars of her window into paper, and her paper birds carry her into the forest. Later that morning, Sister Ignatia assures Gherland that she'll deal with Antain. They discuss that Antain's journey is stirring up hope. In the swamp, Glerk and Fyrian discover the empty house and Xan's note. It's been repaired with Luna's magic and it's missing the word "magic." Glerk decides that it's time for Fyrian to grow up, so the two of them set out to help Xan and Luna. They sense that the volcano is rumbling ominously, like it's about to erupt again.

The madwoman's birds let her down in the swamp, where she discovers that her baby's name is Luna. She turns to caring for the animals, wearing a pair of boots that she's found. Luna is terrified, especially when a flock of paper birds descends around her—though she decides that they're okay when they protect her from Sister Ignatia, who's trying to find her Seven League Boots. Sister Ignatia goes to fetch them from the madwoman and congratulates herself on starting all the stories in the Protectorate about the Witch. At the same time, Antain, terrified, throws a rock at a sparrow (who is actually Xan) and breaks her wing. He carries Xan with him. Fyrian begins to grow at an alarming rate. Back in the Protectorate, Ethyne discovers that Sister Ignatia is gone and begins to plan a rebellion. Knowing that Sister Ignatia is the Witch who cultivates sorrow, she locks unsympathetic Sisters up and opens the library for everyone. Mothers who lost babies inexplicably begin to experience visions of their children growing older, and they feel hopeful for the first time.

Luna suddenly remembers being a child. She saw Xan create a scrying glass and went into a trance, and Xan insisted that she and Glerk couldn't tell Fyrian the truth—he'd tell Luna that Xan is a witch, which would mean that Luna then wouldn't be able to see Xan. Luna instinctively creates a scrying device and asks it to show her Xan. It shows her a sparrow. Xan tries to convince herself that Luna is safe at home as Antain starts to talk about the Day of Sacrifice and tells Xan that he's going to kill the Witch. Xan is horrified to learn that the babies she saved were sacrifices. Antain hears someone coming up the hill. At the top of the hill, Luna, the madwoman, Xan, and Antain all converge with paper birds. Luna recognizes the madwoman as her mother and returns Xan to her human form, and Antain realizes that none of these women are the Witch he seeks. Xan apologizes for taking the abandoned babies and asks for forgiveness. As the three women stand, Sister Ignatia—the

Sorrow Eater—appears. Antain is confused, but the madwoman explains that Sister Ignatia is the Witch and tells Luna that a piece of her is still human. Luna peers into Sister Ignatia's heart, which is encased in a pearl, and sees that it's full of sorrow. She unlocks it just as Fyrian and Glerk bound over the ridge. Fyrian now knows that Sister Ignatia is responsible for his mother's death, so he threatens to kill her. Xan and Glerk talk him down and then, as the volcano rumbles, Fyrian says they need to get to the Protectorate to save everyone from the eruption.

In the Protectorate, Luna joins hands with Xan and the madwoman, and Xan coaches her through creating protective bubbles around everyone. In the aftermath, everyone in the Protectorate remains hopeful. They put the Elders in prison and Luna begins traveling to the Free Cities to tell the Star Children the truth about their parentage—and that their hearts can always hold more love. Luna discovers that her mother's name is Adara. Xan and Sister Ignatia's health deteriorates, and on the day that the first Star Children arrive in the Protectorate, Xan dies of happiness. Glerk takes her to the Bog with him. The parent explains to the child that the kind and generous Witch claimed the Protectorate, and that is the reason why they're prosperous and healthy.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Luna** – One of the novel's protagonists and the titular "girl who drank the moon." As an infant, Luna lives in the Protectorate, a corrupt city where the youngest baby is offered as an annual sacrifice to the **Witch** who is rumored to live in the surrounding forest. She and is the daughter of Adara, a woman who tries to fight against this sacrificial practice and is thus deemed a "madwoman." Even as a baby, Luna has a judgmental and knowing stare, which annoys Gherland, the leader of the Council of Elders, and pulls at the heartstrings of Xan, the kind witch who rescues Luna and the other "Star Children" who are abandoned by the Protectorate. Though Xan doesn't know the true reason why babies like Luna are abandoned, she believes it's her responsibility to place them with adoptive families in the Free Cities. However, Xan accidentally enmagicks Luna by feeding her moonlight, thereby turning Luna into a future witch, so Xan must raise Luna herself with the help of Glerk, a swamp monster, and Fyrian, a dragon. As a small child whose magic hasn't yet "erupted," Luna is mischievous, curious, and extremely smart. She has a mechanical mind and can craft all manner of useful objects. Her magic erupts when she's five years old. It's a disaster: Luna has no idea what she's doing, and she's too energetic to teach. Because of this, Xan places a spell on Luna that's designed to encase her magic in a tiny grain, which in theory makes Luna a teachable student of magic until her magic erupts again at age 13. In reality, Luna cannot hear the word "magic" or see anything to do with magic as a result.

Because of this, Luna's childhood is plagued with headaches and odd dizzy spells. As she approaches her 13th birthday, she understands that there's something about herself that she doesn't understand, but she's unable to figure out what it is until days before her birthday. Eventually, Luna discovers the truth about her magic powers and reunites with Adara after remembering that she is her mother. She protects the city from being destroyed by a volcanic eruption using her magic, and cracks open the heart of Sister Ignatia, the evil witch who rules the Protectorate, killing her. After this, Luna claims leadership over the Protectorate and goes on to teach other Star Children the truth about their biological parents.

**Xan** – A kindly witch who lives in a swamp in the middle of the forest. Xan is about 500 years old and was experimentally enmagicked as a preteen. A wizard named Zosimos mentored her. Zosimos was well aware of Xan's distaste for remembering difficult things. Because of this, when the volcano erupted 500 years ago, Zosimos hid the castle and all his knowledge in such a way that Xan would be able to rediscover it when she needed it. Xan forgets all of this within a year of the eruption, and instead of keeping Zosimos's memory alive, she dedicates herself to raising the dragonling Fyrian, arguing with the swamp monster Glerk, and saving abandoned babies from outside of the Protectorate every year and taking them to the Free Cities. While the abandoned babies are by no means easy to deal with, Xan still dislikes most difficult things. If she senses that something might be difficult, she denies that the difficult element will ever come to pass. This is the case with Luna, a sacrificed baby whom Xan chooses to adopt after accidentally feeding Luna moonlight and enmagicking her. Xan loves the parts of childrearing that would arise for any baby, enmagicked or not—she adores Luna and showers her with toys and books. However, Luna's magic presents several problems for Xan, since she doesn't remember how she's supposed to handle an enmagicked child. She is, however, able to return to the castle, rediscover Zosimos's writings, and come up with a spell to protect Luna. Through this spell, Xan—who is very old and is beginning to feel her age—also sets the time of her own death, since Luna's magic erupting will cause Xan to die. Yet this doesn't scare Xan at all—her only desire is to be able to help teach Luna about magic before she dies. While she fails at this in an important way (Xan's spell means that Luna can't absorb anything to do with magic), Xan is able to give Luna enough tools to manage her abilities when Luna's magic erupts and kills Xan. After Xan's death, Glerk takes her to the Bog.

**Sister Ignatia/The Sorrow Eater** – The novel's antagonist. 500 years ago, this character was known as the Sorrow Eater; Sister Ignatia is a name that she gave herself after there was a volcanic eruption. The Sorrow Eater became an evil individual in her youth, when she experienced the loss of a loved one and instead of dealing with the pain, she locked it away. In doing so, she locked away her heart and her emotions. At the same time

she began to crave sorrow as a source of sustenance, hence being known as the Sorrow Eater. A crafty witch, she was the one who enmagicked young Xan and helped develop the plans to evacuate the castle and save the people who lived in the woods from the volcano—but instead of saving the magicians, she let them burn and then corralled the people in the Protectorate, which she designed to be a sort of sorrow factory. At that point, she took on the name Sister Ignatia and began to promote the story of the **Witch** in the woods who demands a sacrifice of an infant every year. Sister Ignatia understands that this kind of constant loss is an excellent way to keep everyone in a haze of grief, which in addition to feeding her, keeps them from questioning whether the Witch is real or not. Despite the success with which the Protectorate functions for 500 years under her rule, Sister Ignatia also grows complacent during this time. She has no idea that Xan has been rescuing the abandoned babies the entire time, and when Antain and Ethyne finally begin to question things, necessitating Sister Ignatia's journey into the woods, Sister Ignatia realizes that she didn't put precautions in place for what she'd do if her sources of sorrow disappeared. Sister Ignatia ultimately dies after Luna cracks her heart open, exposing her to her suppressed emotions for the first time in centuries.

**Antain** – A young, idealistic man from the Protectorate. The novel follows him from about age 13 into his mid-20s. As a teenager, Antain is an Elder-in-Training. His uncle Gherland, the leader of the Council of Elders, paints Antain as troublingly idealistic and curious, which is shown clearly when Antain expresses disbelief that the Elders just leave the sacrificed baby in the clearing, rather than making sure that the **Witch** takes the baby. Watching a woman (Adara) be forced to sacrifice her baby (Luna) is an experience that breaks Antain's spirit and haunts him for the rest of his life. Though Antain knows that he has to follow the rules, his sense of horror in regards to the Day of Sacrifice means that he quietly tries to stand up for what's right by pretending to be sick or otherwise occupied so he won't have to participate. As a young boy, Antain was the servant for the Sisters of the Star and he regards the Sisters, especially Sister Ignatia, as family. However, in his late teens he visits the imprisoned Adara (referred to as the "madwoman" by the people in the Protectorate) in the Tower, and her **paper birds** attack him, badly scarring his face. After this, Antain begins to think differently about family. While he never gets along well with his own mother or most of his brothers, Antain recognizes that they are more of a family to him than the Sisters were. Following the attack, Antain focuses on his real love, woodworking, and becomes a renowned furniture maker in both the Protectorate and the Free Cities. Antain continues to develop his devotion to his family as he marries his childhood crush, Ethyne, and the two have a son, Luken. Antain begins to suspect that hope and love are extremely powerful when he recognizes that despite his scarred face, Ethyne loves him anyway—something he thought impossible. This leads him to

question the Day of Sacrifice as a whole and vow to kill the Witch and save the Protectorate's children. A sensitive and nonviolent person by nature, Antain struggles as he navigates the forest, though he does emerge alive and victorious. He eventually learns the truth about the Witch and the Day of Sacrifice, and the horrific practice is stopped.

**The Madwoman/Adara** – Luna's mother; she's known for most of the novel as the madwoman. Like Luna, Adara has long, curly black hair and a crescent moon birthmark in the center of her forehead. Luna is slated to be offered in the Protectorate's annual sacrifice of the city's youngest baby, but unlike most mothers of the doomed children, Adara is unwilling to hand baby Luna over without a fight. She climbs into the rafters and shrieks insults and threats at the Elders. The experience of having Luna taken from her breaks Adara's hold on her sanity, so she spends much of the novel imprisoned in the Sisters of the Stars' Tower. While Adara is brought there mostly to feed the evil Sister Ignatia with her sorrow, her imprisonment and madness allows Adara to discover how to use magic. Because she doesn't see the world the way others do, she's able to reach into the universe's cracks (that only she can see) and pull magic out. As she learns to do this, Adara also learns to close off her sadness, thereby starting a war of wills with Sister Ignatia. Adara uses her magic to transform objects into paper, quills, and ink, which she uses to fold enchanted **paper birds**, draw maps that lead to Luna, and write "she is here" (which refers to Luna) over and over again. Eventually, Adara's sense that Luna is still alive grows so strong that she's able to begin transforming her own body. Following Antain's visit, in which Adara accidentally sets her paper birds on him and gets carried away, Adara feels an inexplicable relationship with Antain and keeps an eye on him from the Tower. Antain ultimately uses one of her maps to enter the forest in pursuit of the **Witch**. Adara also escapes at this time and reunites with Luna, something that's cathartic for both mother and daughter. Luna hopes that Adara's mind is fixable, and she begins to heal her mother by rediscovering what her name was and sharing it with her.

**Glerk** – Glerk is, for much of the novel, the friendly swamp monster who lives with Xan and Fyrian (and later, Luna) in the center of the forest. However, the novel also makes it clear that Glerk is a much more important and far-reaching figure in the world of the novel: he's the Beast of the world's origin stories, and he's also known as the Poet (though he usually speaks as though the Poet is someone separate from himself). Glerk is very tall, has four arms with seven fingers each, and a tail with a prehensile tip. Though he looks terrifying, he's a kind individual who looks out for all of his family members. Glerk, like Xan, initially forgot about the volcano's eruption and the events leading up to it 500 years ago. Glerk feels extremely guilty for forgetting, especially when he recognizes that he needs to remember at least some things in order to help Luna. In addition to this sense of guilt and recognition that he should

remember, Glerk also feels strongly that people should know the truth about things. He thinks that Xan's lie to Fyrian (that Fyrian is truly a Simply Enormous Dragon who lives in the land of the giants) is doing the dove-size dragonling a major disservice. He also takes issue with Xan's spell on Luna to corral Luna's magic until she turns 13. As a mentor of sorts for both Luna and Fyrian, Glerk is able to draw on his identity as the Poet, as he espouses compassion and kindness, and tells Fyrian the truth about his size and encourages him to not eat or otherwise harm Sister Ignatia. As Xan's death approaches, Glerk decides that it's time to return to the world as the Beast, and takes Xan's spirit with him to the Bog after she dies.

**Grand Elder Gherland** – The leader of the Council of Elders in the Protectorate and one of the novel's antagonists. He's an old man, is very grand, and loves the prestige that comes along with his position. While there are some good qualities to Gherland—he does love Antain and wants to protect him, even though he recognizes that Antain is a threat to the Council of Elders—Gherland has, over the years, turned himself into an unlikeable figure in the Protectorate. As the Grand Elder, Gherland is responsible for taking and carrying the annual "doomed child" through the town and into the woods to be sacrificed. While he loves that this makes him look powerful, he also detests babies and thinks that they're too loud, selfish, and smelly—and often, they spit up or urinate on him, which makes him feel even less kindly toward them. The very fact that he's willing to carry the babies, however, is something that Gherland sees as a reflection of his selflessness. He sees himself as a caretaker for the community, if a strict one. He's happy to take any opportunity to "teach lessons" to individuals who don't fall into line, and he also loves showing off his wealth and prestige. Gherland is very disturbed when Antain and Ethyne begin stirring up hope, as he's well aware of how the story of the **Witch** (which he knows is untrue) functions to keep the Council of Elders in power, and he understands that hope is going to eventually destroy his power. Though Gherland attempts to work with Sister Ignatia to put a stop to Antain's quest to kill the Witch, Sister Ignatia's failure means that the townsfolk put Gherland and his cronies in prison. "Gherland" briefly becomes an insult following Gherland's imprisonment, but when Gherland refuses to apologize for his actions, he eventually dies alone and is forgotten.

**Fyrian** – A dragonling who was placed in Xan's care right before the volcano erupted 500 years ago. Xan is his aunt figure of sorts, while Glerk acts as his mentor. Despite being even older than Xan, Fyrian inexplicably remains a baby for most of the novel. He's an earnest, curious, and trusting individual who, like most dragons, loves to sing—though Fyrian's singing voice is horrendous, and he's not particularly creative with his lyrics. Glerk finds Fyrian trying and ridiculous, especially since Xan tells Fyrian that he's a Simply Enormous Dragon like Fyrian's mother was, when in reality, Fyrian is still the size of a dove.

Fyrian believes that he lives in the land of the giants, which is why he can fit in Luna's pockets. When Luna is little, Fyrian teaches her math and seems much older, but as Luna grows, she notices that Fyrian seems younger and younger. He's her constant companion and wants nothing more than to be loved and accepted by everyone in his family. Fyrian only begins to grow in the hours before the volcano erupts again, when Glerk decides that it's time to leave the swamp to help Xan. Upon leaving the swamp, Fyrian begins to grow at an alarming rate, though his body parts grow at different rates until he's bigger than Glerk. While it's upsetting for Fyrian to learn that Xan lied to him, Glerk is able to make him feel better by insisting that they'll always be friends and that Xan did what she could to protect Fyrian. Fyrian makes the choice to not kill Sister Ignatia, who's responsible for his mother's death, something that Glerk suggests is a reflection of Fyrian's Simply Enormous heart and capacity for compassion. As an actual Simply Enormous Dragon, Fyrian helps Luna spread the truth about the Star Children to the Free Cities.

**Ethyne** – A kind, bright, and clever young woman in the Protectorate. She had a crush on Antain when the two were in school but, when Ethyne's parents died and orphaned her, Ethyne agreed to join the Sisters of the Star, thereby making her ineligible for romantic relationships. Ethyne has a critical and curious mind, so she's surprised to see that nobody in the Tower mentions the **Witch**. She eventually discovers that the Witch is actually Sister Ignatia, the head Sister, and chooses to leave the organization at this point. Ethyne has no issue with the scars Antain sustained from the madwoman's **paper birds**, and the two marry soon after Ethyne leaves the Sisters. They have a son, Luken, who is slated to be sacrificed to the Witch weeks after his birth. Ethyne's hope for a better future is contagious. Her hope and love inspire Antain to go into the forest to kill the Witch, and Gherland is extremely offended by her positivity, happiness, and love of life. While Antain and Sister Ignatia are in the forest, Ethyne creates a rebellion in the Protectorate by locking up the Sisters who won't help her and protesting with the townsfolk. She graciously takes Luna and Adara into her home following the volcano's eruption.

**Zosimos** – Zosimos was Xan's mentor; he's been dead for 500 years. He was an old wizard even when Xan met him, but he began to decline quickly after taking Xan under his wing. Zosimos was one of the magicians who lived in the castle and studied magic, but he thought it was extremely unethical when the Sorrow Eater brought in a child (Xan) to experimentally enmagic and study. He loved to speak about things in an obscure manner, which infuriated Xan, but he also understood her penchant for forgetting. Before his death, he hid the castle and his life's work for Xan to rediscover later. Zosimos died alongside Fyrian's mother, when both of them dove into the volcano to stop the eruption.

**The Parent** – The person who tells their child the stories of the

**Witch** and of the Protectorate throughout the novel. While the parent is unnamed and ungendered, it's possible that this person is Adara's mother or Ethyne's mother, since both women lost a baby boy to the sacrifice. In the parent's final story, which ends the novel, they reflect on the positive changes that came about when Luna unseated Sister Ignatia. The parent praises the Bog and the Witch—presumably Luna—and says that the children in the Protectorate are now happy and healthy.

**Antain's Mother** – The mother of Antain, Rook, and Wyn. A callous and greedy widow. She's well-connected, but nobody to whom she's connected—namely, Elder Gherland—likes her very much. Antain's mother desperately wants her sons to do well, and when they do succeed she sees it as a reflection on her parenting and as something that she deserves. She's horrified by Antain's trajectory in life until he's been a successful carpenter for years.

**The Crow** – A crow that Luna conjures accidentally as her magic starts to erupt in the lead-up to her 13th birthday. It caws, but Luna understands that these noises mean things in human speech. The crow acts as a conscience of sorts (albeit a foul-mouthed one), and tries to guide Luna along the safest path as she journeys to try to save Xan.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Mae** – A Sister of the Star who was friends with Ethyne while Ethyne was part of the organization. With Sister Ignatia gone, Mae is willing to follow Ethyne in overthrowing the Sisters and the Elders.

**Fyrian's Mother** – A huge and beautiful dragon. She put baby Fyrian in Xan's care before diving into the volcano with Zosimos to stop the eruption, 500 years before the novel begins.

**Rook** – One of Antain's little brothers. He becomes the servant for the Sisters of the Star when he turns nine.

**Wyn** – Antain's youngest brother and the Sisters' servant when Ethyne re-enters the Tower to overthrow Sister Ignatia.

**Luken** – Antain and Ethyne's baby. As the youngest child in the Protectorate, he's slated to be the sacrifice for the Year of Sorrow.

**Elder Raspin** – The oldest Elder in the Protectorate.

## TERMS

**Enmagic** – The process of making a person, usually a child, a magical witch or wizard. This happens by feeding a child moonlight, which a witch can gather on her fingers from the sky. Enmagicked children are dangerous until they learn to channel their powers. In the novel, **Xan** accidentally enmagicks **Luna**.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## FAMILY AND LOVE

*The Girl Who Drank the Moon* follows a sorrowful city called the Protectorate, which every year sacrifices its youngest infant to a **Witch** who supposedly demands the child. In reality, the story of the evil, bloodthirsty Witch is nothing more than a story designed to subdue the populace—although, unbeknownst to the Elders (the governing body in the Protectorate), there is a witch named Xan who, though she has no idea why a parent abandons a baby every year, feels that it's a horrible crime to leave the infants for the animals. She takes these abandoned children to the Free Cities, where they grow up in adoptive families that love them. In exploring the intense and unbreakable bonds between birth parents and the children who are taken from them, as well as the loving and equally as strong relationships among members of adoptive or chosen families, *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* makes it clear that individuals don't need to share blood to be family. Instead, it proposes that love, care, and positive regard are what makes a family, regardless of their official relationship status.

The very fact that the Elders use what's effectively kidnapping to subdue the population speaks to the power of familial love, and the damage that can be done when someone or something destroys the bond between parents and their children. Everyone in the Protectorate knows someone who's lost a baby to the sacrifice, and the entire town is damaged by the intense, collective grief that everyone experiences as a result of a child being kidnapped yearly for centuries. Even the unnamed, callous parent, who tells a child the story of the Witch and the history of the Protectorate throughout the novel, takes a reflective tone when they talk about their grief at losing a baby 18 or 19 years ago. The visceral recollection of this loss, despite the overall angry and volatile demeanor of the parent, speaks to the power of the bond between parent and child that the novel presents as fact.

While the kidnapping in the Protectorate is understandably a solemn and horrific affair, the corresponding celebration in the Free Cities where Xan takes the abandoned baby—known as Star Child Day—speaks to the power of adoption and of love to make a family, whether or not families share blood ties. Xan carefully cares for each infant as she carries them through the forest and then goes to great lengths to find them an appropriate family in the Free Cities. For the rest of those

children's lives, Xan exists as a beloved auntie or grandmother, while their adoptive parents are fully and unequivocally parents to their adoptive children. However, the novel begins to question and expand on its suggestion of what families and love can look, as mothers in the Protectorate who lost babies begin to inexplicably experience memories or visions of their children walking, falling in love, or having children of their own. Similarly, the novel focuses an entire subplot on Luna's mother, who's known for most of the novel as the madwoman. She instinctively knows that Luna is alive, and writes "she is here" over and over again on enchanted paper. With this, *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* makes it clear that while a child's adoptive parents are absolutely their legitimate parents, this doesn't mean that the inherent bond between birth parents and their children disappears.

Luna, the book's protagonist, is a sacrificed child who, because Xan accidentally enmagicks her, must stay in the care of Xan, the bog monster Glerk, and their adoptive dragonling, Fyrian. Luna is the character through which the reader can see firsthand that families can take all different forms, and that the most important thing in the making of a family is that there's love involved. Xan makes it very clear that even before Luna came on the scene, she, Glerk, and Fyrian were a family, despite the fact that none of them share blood. Technically speaking, Glerk is Xan and Fyrian's creator—per the creation story of the novel's world, Glerk arose from the life-giving Bog and brought the rest of the world into being through poetry. But in terms of his day-to-day family life, Glerk takes on the role of a beloved (if crotchety and put-upon) uncle, while Xan is an auntie to Fyrian and a grandmother to Luna.

At the same time as the mothers in the Protectorate begin to "remember" their children, Luna's magic begins to erupt out of her, and Luna and her mother finally reconnect. Meeting her mother, whose real name is Adara, is a bit of an odd experience for Luna, but she comes to an important conclusion: families can always get bigger. She has enough love in her heart to love both Adara and Xan, and she goes on to help the Star Children discover that they can love both their birth and adoptive parents once the evil organizations in charge of the Protectorate are thwarted. That Luna, Xan, and Adara put their magic together to save the Protectorate, the Free Cities, and everyone else they can from the volcano's eruption stands as proof that familial love is one of the most powerful things in the world. Because of this, going forward, growing families in the Protectorate can stay together, while the larger familial networks created by the Star Children can connect and discover that their love truly is boundless.



## STORYTELLING, CENSORSHIP, AND CONTROL

*The Girl Who Drank the Moon* introduces the reader to a world in which storytelling of all sorts reigns

supreme. In the universe the novel portrays, the world itself rose up out of a story told by its creator. Meanwhile, in the town known as the Protectorate, evil agents create and promote the narrative that there's an evil witch who lives in the forest and demands a yearly sacrifice of an infant. This story allows them to influence society, control the population, and robs their subjects of the ability to think critically about the government. Through these different stories, and specifically through the censorship attempts of the Council of Elders and the Sisters of the Star, the novel parses out the various functions of both telling and censoring stories. *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* suggests through this that storytelling is both the root of all power and the most effective way of maintaining the power and control that a person already has.

*The Girl Who Drank the Moon* shows at various points how the same story can appear very different—with different heroes, villains, and outcomes—depending on who's telling it. It does this first by introducing the reader to the story of the **Witch** who lives in the forest and demands a yearly sacrifice. In reality, this witch is fictitious, while the only real witch at the beginning of the novel, Xan, isn't evil at all. Through the contrast between the mythical witch and Xan, the real witch, the novel asks readers to engage with its different stories critically and consider the context of different purposes, intents, and storytellers, rather than accepting the narrator's various stories as unadulterated fact. Indeed, the novel's structure, which offers third-person narration focusing on several different characters all dealing with similar problems, encourages readers to do this as well. This enables readers to piece together a larger, more complete picture of what's going on and what is most likely to be true, while also allowing insight into how different characters interpret information and stories incorrectly or incompletely, depending on who they are or how they get it.

While the reader is offered an omniscient view similar to the one the narrator has, individual characters within the novel are often at the mercy of intense censorship attempts and have a limited idea of what's going on, if they have any idea at all. The Council of Elders' promotion of the Day of Sacrifice, and the way that the Sisters of the Star hoard and protect the books contained in their library, creates a society that's educated in the sense that young people attend school, but not a society that's critical. Nobody learns to think for themselves; rather, students learn what the Elders want them to learn and nothing more.

Most telling in regards to the way that the Elders' and the Sisters' censorship creates a society run by fear, grief, and unthinking trust in the establishment are the chapters in which an unnamed parent in the Protectorate tells their child about the Witch. Though the text of the novel doesn't actually include the child's responses to the parent, it's clear from the way the parent speaks that these stories are terrifying for the child. The

parent threatens to send their child to the Witch if they don't behave, and the parent also makes the case several times that there's only one correct interpretation of the stories—proof of how intense the Elders' grip is on the Protectorate. Later in the novel, Sister Ignatia, one of the Sisters of the Star, admits in her own words that every story about the Witch that circulates in the Protectorate is something that she started, making it clear that all the stories the parent tells are Sister Ignatia's work. While Sister Ignatia's confession in her narration is damning in its own right, it nevertheless speaks to the success with which she obtained and maintains control over the town via storytelling and censorship—all while creating the illusion of a free society by offering students an education and allowing "information" and rumors to circulate.

Once the novel's action (and specifically, Sister Ignatia) moves to the forest and away from the Protectorate, the town begins to be able to see through the years and years of censorship, control, and power grabs. Notably, once the Protectorate starts to feel hopeful and begins to realize that their government is wholly corrupt (and that the only real witches in the forest want to help protect them from the erupting volcano, not steal their babies), the people have little hesitance in imprisoning the Elders, abolishing the Sisters of the Star, and opening the Sisters' library for general use. With this, the novel suggests that the best way to thwart censorship is, first of all, to acquire the knowledge that what those enforcing censorship promote isn't true; and then, to begin telling new, truthful stories. The final chapter of the novel is another story from the parent in which they tell their child that the witch (presumably Luna) belongs to them, protects them, and champions free speech and knowledge. This offers hope that as life in the Protectorate goes on, the stories that circulate and get passed down through generations will be truthful, positive ones that teach children to think critically, not tools meant to subdue and control everyone.



## MEMORY, FORGETTING, AND THE FUTURE

The world of the novel is one that's about to reach a tipping point: as young enmagicked Luna approaches the age of 13, her magical power grows, while Xan's power wanes; the sleeping volcano in the woods is about to erupt after 500 years of restless dormancy; and after 500 years of acceptance and complacency in the Protectorate, Antain decides that it's time to confront the **Witch** who demands infants as sacrifice and save the Protectorate's children. For Xan and Glerk, these events are, to a degree, things that they've experienced before—but they begin to run into problems when they find that they've purposefully forgotten what happened last time. With this, the novel suggests that while forgetting may be a useful tool to protect oneself emotionally, it's absolutely necessary to remember the past—distant and not so distant—in order to effectively plan

and fight for a better future.

When the reader first meets Xan, she's content and certainly not upset that she doesn't remember her past (though she does remember that it wasn't necessarily happy). This outlook on life changes, however, when Xan accidentally enmagicks the infant Luna by feeding her moonlight instead of starlight, making it so that at some point, Luna will be a witch capable of performing magic. At this point, Xan recognizes that she must remember her past, which contains important parallels: like Luna, Xan was enmagicked as a child, and she knows that she'll need to remember what happened to her mentor Zosimos, since this, she believes, is likely what's going to happen to her as Luna's mentor. These leaps in understanding make an important point: while it's not necessary or healthy for a person to  *dwell*  on their past, it's still important to  *remember*  past events. History will, no doubt, repeat itself, and a thorough understanding of the past means that a person will have a better chance of being prepared for the future.

Importantly, the novel suggests that when a person isn't in a situation where they're forced to live with past trauma day in and day out (as in the Protectorate), it's a natural inclination to want to forget the past. The narrator notes that both Glerk and Xan—and to a degree, the dragonling Fyrian—were there for the volcano's last eruption and the havoc and destruction it wrought. But within a year, Xan and Glerk happily chose to forget, and Fyrian inexplicably remains a dragonling and doesn't remember the particulars of what happened. Remembering, this implies, is far more emotionally difficult than forgetting. The novel supports this by showing how, as they begin to remember, both Xan and Glerk experience moments of intense remorse and guilt for not keeping the past easily accessible in their minds. They understand that, had they done so, they would've been in a better place to protect everyone—themselves, Luna, and those in the Protectorate.

To make the importance of memory to the future even clearer, the novel plays close attention to the consequences of how Xan handles Luna's volatile magic by placing a spell on five-year-old Luna, which traps Luna's magic in a rice-grain-sized casing in her brain. The idea, according to Xan, is that with Luna's magic contained, Luna will be able to learn how to appropriately use it and so be prepared when she turns 13 and her magic is unleashed—but Xan's spell doesn't work as planned. Rather than turn Luna into a safe and compliant student of magic, it makes it so that she cannot see, hear, or understand anything concerning magic, as mentioning it sends her into an odd trance that can last for days. In Luna's case, being physiologically unable to remember magic or learn about it has dire consequences—Xan knows that she's going to die not long after Luna turns 13, and therefore won't be around to teach her. Because of the way that Luna and Xan's respective magics are linked, this means that as Luna gets close to her birthday, Xan becomes increasingly ill as Luna begins to remember odd things

and, finally, is able to read the word "magic." Luna is effectively on her own to figure things out due to Xan's failing health and the spell. While the narrator makes it very clear that Xan cast this spell on Luna for her own protection, the degree to which Luna struggles without assistance as her magic begins to break free makes it clear that interfering with a person's memory—especially when that entails forcing someone to forget—is an inhumane and unsafe thing to do.

Luna, Xan, and their friends aren't able to effectively triumph until they are all able to remember who they are, who they were, and what they're capable of doing. Because they are ultimately able to remember, Luna is able to save the Protectorate and the Free Cities from the volcano. She's also able to help her mother, who long ago forgot her name and is known for most of the novel as the madwoman, remember who she is. With this, the novel shows that remembering is important for more than just securing the future and learning how to harness one's power—it is, in many cases, essential to healing and discovering who a person truly is.



## SORROW VS. HOPE

One of the few things that Xan can infer from the past is that sorrow is dangerous, and that a person should hide their sorrow at all costs, though she can't remember exactly why. The reader eventually comes to learn that this is because Sister Ignatia—formerly known as the Sorrow Eater—feeds on other people's sorrow, and does whatever she can to create and harvest it like someone might harvest crops. While Sister Ignatia's ability to literally ingest sorrow is something wholly fantastical, the novel still makes the case that dwelling too much on sorrow can be a dangerous proposition, as sadness and grief can rob entire communities of critical thinking skills and the ability to recognize their own power. Hope, on the other hand, is something that the novel shows has the power to overcome sadness and restore the autonomy and wellbeing of individuals and communities alike.

The novel makes the connection between sorrow and a lack of agency early on by illustrating clearly how the Day of Sacrifice turns the horrific sacrifice of an infant into a respected tradition that no one has the power to question. When Grand Elder Gherland and the Council come upon the selected mother (**Adara**) and child (Luna) who will be sacrificed for the year, the mother shocks them with her animalistic grief and her attempts to protect her child. Such a thing, the narrator explains, just isn't done. In this way, the novel suggests that one of the best ways to foster sorrow is to normalize and codify it (in this case, by making it a holiday of sorts). This also means that the Elders have the power to insist that the mother, who is known for much of the novel simply as "the madwoman," is indeed mad—rather than a parent who is understandably and justifiably enraged that her government is kidnapping her child. Importantly, the specifics of the ritual function to ensure that

the grief and sorrow aren't experienced only by the parents of the child in question. Forcing the entire town to line up and watch the Elders carry the child into the woods, and setting up a system in which any family could be the next to lose a child, creates a population collectively gripped by grief. Forcing people to dwell on grief in this way, the novel suggests, is a very effective method of keeping people from asking questions.

Through Antain's journey through marriage, early fatherhood, and his quest to kill the **Witch**, *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* suggests that there are a few things that have the power to give a person the tools to question sadness and develop hope: knowledge, love, and a personal stake in things. Because of Antain's brief stint as a teenage Elder-in-Training, he's witnessed firsthand what it's like to leave a baby in the forest (which the Elders do in private after parading the baby through the streets)—and he found it absolutely horrifying. While this gives him the impetus to begin questioning and rejecting the Day of Sacrifice, it's his love for his wife, Ethyne, and Luken, their newborn slated for sacrifice, that gives him the final push to attempt to put a stop to things more than a decade later.

After Antain goes into the forest to find and kill the Witch, Sister Ignatia goes in after him to kill him, knowing that "the Witch" must kill him in order to maintain the façade in the Protectorate. However, with Sister Ignatia out of the Protectorate and no longer actively stirring up sorrow at every turn, Ethyne is able to begin rallying people to her and Antain's side, showing clearly that people who are forced to actively grieve every minute of every day can't operate at their full potential and can't experience what it's like to feel hopeful or in control. Put another way, Sister Ignatia's constant sorrowful presence and being consistently exposed to the trauma of losing children keeps people in the Protectorate from ever healing. More broadly, while people who experience loss of any kind can and should grieve for their loved ones, the novel makes the case that the issue arises when people never have the opportunity to move on and reorient themselves to more hopeful things.

*The Girl Who Drank the Moon* offers an example of a healthier way of dealing with sorrow after the volcano's explosion, when Xan declines and ultimately dies. While Luna and her friends certainly grieve for Xan, they also have the skills to put a more positive spin on her death—she was more than 500 years old, lived a full life, and spent her life making those of others better. When Xan finally does die, Luna focuses on these aspects and on the future in order to handle her grief. While this is, of course, not a perfect parallel to the loss parents experienced on the Day of Sacrifice (which was senseless and pointless, while Xan's death was natural and expected), it nevertheless encourages readers to consider that while sorrow may be an element of the normal range of human emotions, it shouldn't be the dominant one. Rather, meeting sad experiences with hope allows individuals to frame those events in ways that allow

them to heal and look to the future with curiosity and understanding.



## SYMBOLS

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



### THE WITCH

According to the Elders who rule the Protectorate, there is a Witch who terrorizes the forest and demands a baby as a sacrifice every year. This fictional Witch—as opposed to any of the *actual* witches in the novel—symbolizes storytelling's power to control people, as the specific Witch that the Elders talk about does exist. Instead, she's nothing more than a story designed to keep the populace terrified, sorrowful, and under control of the Protectorate's powerful elite. At several points throughout the novel, the reader discovers that there are real witches around. One of them, Xan, who lives in the forest and takes the abandoned babies in order to protect them (rather than harm them), is kind and certainly doesn't demand the sacrifice; while Sister Ignatia, the Head Sister of the Order of the Star, is more akin to the Witch in the stories. In this way, the various versions of the Witch speak more broadly to the fact that stories can be slippery and easy to manipulate. Anyone, the novel suggests, can be the Witch if the storyteller makes their case in the right way.



### PAPER BIRDS

The paper birds that the madwoman makes in her cell in the Tower represent how hope grows over the course of the novel. As the madwoman gradually discovers that Sister Ignatia thrives on others' sorrow and hopelessness, the madwoman learns how to shut her own sadness in. As she does, she learns to perform magic and in doing so, cultivate hope within herself. This culminates in the paper birds, which allow the woman to keep hoping for the possibility of escaping her imprisonment and reuniting with her long-lost daughter, Luna. They do so by protecting the madwoman and her daughter (as when they attack Sister Ignatia) and eventually helping her to escape and find her Luna. The fact that the birds are made of paper and are created by the madwoman speaks to the fact that while hope may exist naturally in the world (as real birds do), it's also possible to create hope for oneself through dedicated work.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the

Algonquin Young Readers edition of *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* published in 2019.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ They left knowing that there surely *wasn't* a witch. There never *had* been a witch. There were only a dangerous forest and a single road and a thin grip on a life that the Elders had enjoyed for generations. The Witch—that is, the belief in her—made for a frightened people, a subdued people, a compliant people, who lived their lives in a saddened haze, the clouds of their grief numbing their senses and dampening their minds. It was terribly convenient for the Elders' unencumbered rule.

**Related Characters:** Luna, Antain, Grand Elder Gherland

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 2. In Which an Unfortunate Woman Goes Quite Mad12

### Explanation and Analysis

After Elder Gherland shuts down Antain's suggestion that the Elders wait to make sure that the Witch gets the sacrificed baby instead of the wild animals, the narrator explains that as far as Gherland knows, there is no witch—the Witch is a story meant to control and subdue the people of the Protectorate. This lays out clearly how controlling a narrative can be used to keep people in power, and how sadness is a powerful emotion that can easily be manipulated. Specifically, when the narrator mentions that the people of the Protectorate aren't able to think or question because sadness dampens their minds, it shows that it's impossible to be a fully functional, questioning member of society when someone lives day in and day out with intense grief. In this way, the novel shows that even more powerful than using storytelling or people's sorrow alone to control them is the combination of the two.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ “Luna,” she said. “Your name will be Luna. And I will be your grandmother. And we will be a family.”

And just by saying so, Xan knew it was true. The words hummed in the air between them, stronger than any magic.

**Related Characters:** Xan (speaker), Luna

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 3. In Which a Witch Accidentally Enmagics an Infant27

### Explanation and Analysis

After enmagicking baby Luna, Xan names Luna, and declares that they'll be a family. The narrator's insistence that Xan's words (that she and Luna will be a family) are stronger than magic situates familial love as one of the most important and powerful forces of the novel. The love between parents and children is portrayed as something extremely powerful, even magical, that endures even when they are separated from each other. It's especially telling that this is the case even though Luna and Xan don't actually share blood. Because of Xan's centuries-long history of forming families through adoption with the Star Children, Xan certainly understands that adoption is a perfectly legitimate way of forming a family. This makes the case that what makes people family is deciding that this is the case—anyone, the novel suggests, can be family, as long as they love and care for each other.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ *Sometimes. I have this dream. About your brother. He would be eighteen now. No. Nineteen. I have this dream that he has dark hair and luminous skin and stars in his eyes. I dream that when he smiles, it shines for miles around. Last night I dreamed that he waited next to a tree for a girl to walk by. And he called her name, and held her hand, and his heart pounded when he kissed her.*

*What? No. I'm not crying. Why would I cry? Silly thing.*

**Related Characters:** The Parent (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** Chapter 4. In Which It Was Just a Dream29

### Explanation and Analysis

The parent tells their child about a dream they have about their baby, who was sacrificed 18 or 19 years ago. First, it's important to note that the parent probably is crying, despite their protestations. This makes it clear that while the parent puts on a tough face for the child and is generally portrayed as an abrasive individual throughout the novel, they still share in the Protectorate's collective grief at the loss of a child every year. Still, almost 20 years later, they clearly feel the loss acutely. This shows how the story of the Witch, despite being a fictional invention of the city's leadership,

functions to spread the sadness throughout the Protectorate. Because the Protectorate sacrifices a child every year, the parent never actually has the opportunity to heal and recover from the trauma of losing their own child, thus highlighting the power of storytelling and myth to manipulate people's emotions and sense of truth.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ ("But what if they *all* are important, Uncle?" Antain had asked the Grand Elder once.

"They can't possibly be. In any case, by denying access, we give our people a gift. They learn to accept their lot in life. They learn that any action is inconsequential. Their days remain, as they should be, cloudy. There is no greater gift than that. Now. Where is my Zirin tea?")

**Related Characters:** Grand Elder Gherland, Antain (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 6. In Which Antain Gets Himself in Trouble43

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains that one of Antain's duties as an Elder-in-Training is to choose a few important community complaints or questions from a chalkboard and erase the rest. Gherland's insistence that it's a gift to the people to deny them access to their leadership shows again how those in the Protectorate use censorship to control the population. While they create these opportunities that give people the illusion that they can be involved and have a say in how their government functions, in reality, the people are powerless. While neither the narrator nor Gherland goes deeper into how Antain chooses which ones are important (or, for that matter, what the Council then does with the complaints), it's likely that Antain is supposed to choose those that are inoffensive to the Elders to begin with—or, if he is able to select those that are more hard hitting, that it's only to create the perception that the Elders care and are working on the problem, whatever that problem might be.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ Xan visited the Free Cities twice a year, once with Luna and once without. She did not explain to the child the purpose for her solo visit—nor did she tell her about the sad town on the other side of the forest, or of the babies left in that small clearing, presumably to die. She'd have to tell the girl eventually, of course. One day, Xan told herself. Not now. It was too sad. And Luna was too little to understand.

**Related Characters:** Luna, Xan

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** Chapter 7. In Which a Magical Child is More Trouble By Half52

### Explanation and Analysis

As Luna grows up, the narrator explains that Xan only takes Luna on some of her trips to the Free Cities and actively keeps information from Luna for Luna's own good. This shows that censorship isn't just something that evil characters engage in—Xan is one of the kindest characters in the novel and yet, she still keeps important information from Luna. But ultimately, despite Xan's pure intentions, this omission of information ends up being just as damaging as the widespread censorship in the Protectorate, as it keeps Luna from discovering who she is or asking any questions that might help the situation in the Protectorate. With this, the novel makes the case that censorship in general has no real benefit. Good intentions don't make censorship any better; regardless of the purpose, it still results in dramatic and dangerous gaps in understanding.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ *But he didn't kill the Witch. The Witch killed him instead.*

*This is why it doesn't pay to be brave. Bravery makes nothing, protects nothing, results in nothing. It only makes you dead. And this is why we don't stand up to the Witch. Because even a powerful old wizard was no match for her.*

**Related Characters:** The Parent (speaker), Sister Ignatia/The Sorrow Eater, Fyrian's Mother, Zosimos

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 8. In Which a Story Contains a Hint of Truth59

**Explanation and Analysis**

The parent tells the story of the volcano's eruption 500 years ago, which Zosimos and Fyrian's mother stopped by diving into the volcano. However, in this retelling, the Witch kills Zosimos. It's important to keep in mind that all the stories that the Parent tells were started by Sister Ignatia, which means that they all have the purpose of subduing and controlling the population. With this background, it's easy to see why Sister Ignatia would've cast Zosimos as a failed hero who teaches people to not be brave—it ensures that nobody will ever wonder if there's anything to gain by standing up to her or the Witch. Again, this demonstrates how censorship and storytelling can create a population that's easy to manipulate, and specifically, one that's easy to keep from ever thinking critically about the world around them. Because of this story, the unthinking population in the Protectorate will be far less likely to try to better themselves, since according to the stories of how the Protectorate came into being, there's no point in even trying.

**Chapter 9 Quotes**

“I remember. All at once.” He shook his head. “Why had I forgotten?”

Xan pushed her wrinkled lips to one side. “Sorrow is dangerous. Or, at least, it was. I can't remember why, now. I think we both became accustomed to not remembering things. We just let things get...foggy.”

**Related Characters:** Xan, Glerk (speaker), Zosimos, Luna

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** Chapter 9. In Which Several Things Go Wrong68

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Luna's magic erupts when she's five years old, which results in, among other things, her accidentally turning Glerk into a bunny, Xan and Glerk remember Xan's childhood and her bumpy path to becoming an adult witch. Xan's childhood was unhappy, and the period that she's now starting to remember was also unhappy, suggesting that forgetting in this instance is understandable. It's clear that Xan has suppressed difficult memories in order to cope with her situation. However, both Xan and Glerk's tones, and the gravity of the situation (they must figure out some way to deal with Luna, who's out of control), suggest that it's important to keep memories accessible rather than

destroying them entirely. In other words, it's important to have access to one's memories so that one can use them to make the future better, though it's also important to not dwell on memories and grief the way that people in the Protectorate do.

**Chapter 13 Quotes**

“Most were sent packing at the age of twelve—right when they had begun to get comfortable. Once they became aware of how much learning there was to be had in the libraries of the Tower and they became hungry for it, they were sent away.”

**Related Characters:** Antain, Sister Ignatia/The Sorrow Eater

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 13. In Which Antain Pays a Visit85-86

**Explanation and Analysis**

The narrator explains how the Sisters of the Star take on young boys as servants, but fire the boys as soon as they discover how much there is to learn in the Tower. Though Antain doesn't fully understand it, this is one of the many ways that the combined efforts of the Sisters of the Star and the Council of Elders keep the population of the Protectorate under control. The boys who serve the Sisters are likely the only people in the town who even get a glimpse of how much there is to learn in the world—Gherland implied earlier in the novel that school in the Protectorate truly is a joke, in that it essentially keeps kids occupied until they're old enough to work. In a sense then, the Tower is the only place of learning, but access is given only to a few, a practice that shows just how powerful the limitation of information can be in keeping a population controlled and subdued.

**Chapter 14 Quotes**

“*The child was never magic*, Xan started telling herself. And indeed, the more Xan told herself that it *might* be true, the more she was able to convince herself that it *was* true. And if Luna ever was magic, all that power was now neatly stoppered up and wouldn't be a problem.”

**Related Characters:** Luna, Xan

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** Chapter 14. In Which There Are Consequences 109

### Explanation and Analysis

After it becomes clear that Xan's spell on Luna has one major flaw—that Luna can't understand anything to do with magic—Xan begins to tell herself that Luna was never magic to begin with. Most important here is the way that Xan lies to herself until it begins to seem true. This shows that storytelling and censorship of sorts is something that individuals can carry out for themselves; it isn't just something that governments do to control a larger population. By doing this, Xan also begins to forget that Luna actually *is* magic, which then means that Xan is poorly prepared when Luna's magic does begin to erupt. This illustrates how censorship can also aid in forgetting emotionally difficult but important information—when the information isn't readily available, for whatever reason, it's much easier to let things slide.

## Chapter 16 Quotes

☛☛ The madwoman in the Tower could not remember her own name.

She could remember no one's name.

What was a name, anyway? You can't hold it. You can't smell it. You can't rock it to sleep. You can't whisper your love to it over and over and over again. There was once a name that she treasured above all others. But it had flown away, like a bird. And she could not coax it back.

**Related Characters:** Luna, The Madwoman/Adara

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** Chapter 16. In Which There Is Ever So Much Paper 127

### Explanation and Analysis

Luna's mother, the madwoman, muses on the pointlessness of names. The madwoman's character as a whole is a prime example of what happens when a person is subject to intense censorship and trauma, day in and day out: she forgets who she is, and in this case especially, can only remember her trauma. By comparing her lost name to her lost baby and suggesting that the lost baby is more important, the novel reminds the reader that per its logic, familial love between birth parents and their children is the most powerful magic there is—and maintaining this relationship in one's memory is even more important than

remembering one's name.

## Chapter 17 Quotes

☛☛ Fyrian seemed younger and younger every day. Sometimes, it seemed to Luna that he was going backward in time while she stood still, but other times it seemed that the opposite was true: it was Fyrian who was standing still while Luna raced forward. She wondered why this was.

*Dragons!* Glerk would explain.

*Dragons!* Xan would agree. They both shrugged. Dragons, it was decided. What can one do?

Which never actually answered anything.

**Related Characters:** Xan, Glerk, Fyrian, Luna

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** Chapter 17. In Which There Is a Crack in the Nut 136-37

### Explanation and Analysis

As Luna begins to approach her 13th birthday, she muses that Fyrian seems younger, and nobody will tell her why this is. To Xan and Glerk's credit, neither of them really know why Fyrian has been seemingly stuck in infancy for the past five centuries—but Glerk does say later that it's not normal for dragons to develop in this way. This makes it clear that Xan and Glerk are keeping something from Luna, which in turn keeps her from being able to figure out who she is or how she should best prepare for her future.

Possibly even more importantly, the fact that Xan and Glerk keep this from Luna means that Luna feels compelled to keep things to herself and not ask about them. By creating a situation in which Luna doesn't feel like she can ask questions of her guardians and get real, honest answers, Luna is left to her own devices to figure out how the world works. This suggests that trying to protect young people by keeping information from them is inevitably harmful, since it will ultimately leave them unprepared for navigating the world and understanding the true nature of themselves and their surroundings.

## Chapter 18 Quotes

☛☛ *What if we are wrong about the Witch? What if we are wrong about the sacrifice?* Antain wondered. The question itself was revolutionary. And astonishing. *What would happen if we tried?*

Why had the thought never occurred to him before?

**Related Characters:** Antain (speaker), Luken, Ethyne

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 18. In Which a Witch Is Discovered 147

### Explanation and Analysis

The year before Antain's son, Luken, will be sacrificed to the Witch, Antain and Ethyne begin to wonder if they were wrong about the sacrifice, and if it's possible to reason with the Witch. This begins to draw out the elements that make a person more likely to ask questions, and in doing so, begin to dismantle the Elders' and the Sisters' censorship attempts. Remember that, per the narrator, the entire point of the Day of Sacrifice is to keep the population sad, unthinking, and under control. For Antain, the realization that his unborn baby is going to be the next child sacrificed makes the Day of Sacrifice real to him in a way that it hasn't been before. Now, he has a stake in things, so it feels more pressing to him to stand up and ask questions about why he has to do this in the first place. By beginning to ask these questions, Antain can begin to pull power away from those in charge and take it for himself, something that the novel suggests ultimately allows for a better and happier society.

mothers who lost babies to the sacrifice—they tell Luna that her experience was real and that there's more to her than she knows, even if the things she sees don't make sense.

The fact that Luna can recall this memory even with Xan's insistence that it's not real speaks to the power of both these memories and the bond between birth mother and child—those powerful elements are strong enough to overcome Xan's attempts to create a false narrative for Luna. It's also worth noting that Luna shows that she's well aware of something odd going on with her memory. This is because of Xan's spell that inadvertently made it so that Luna can't retain anything that has to do with magic, but Luna has no way of understanding this explanation. Instead, because of the way that Xan has made it impossible for her to retain knowledge, Luna is left to wonder and figure out on her own how her brain works and why it works this way. This means, too, that Luna doesn't have any memories of magic that might help her figure out what it is to go on when her magic finally does erupt and she's put in a position where she needs to use it, a situation that highlights just how destructive censorship can be.

☞ And the things that they did *not* speak of began to outweigh the things that they *did*. Each secret, each unspoken thing was round and hard and heavy and cold, like a stone hung around the necks of both grandmother and girl. Their backs bent under the weight of secrets.

## Chapter 19 Quotes

☞ Luna didn't have very many memories that were as tenacious as this one—her memory, typically, was a slippery thing, and difficult to pin down—and so she hung on to it. This image *meant* something. She was *sure* of it.

Her grandmother, now that she thought about it, never spoke of memories. Not ever.

**Related Characters:** Grand Elder Gherland, The Madwoman/Adara, Antain, Xan, Luna

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** Chapter 19. In Which There Is a Journey to the Town of Agony 161

### Explanation and Analysis

Luna recalls the Day of Sacrifice in which she was the infant given up as an offering. She remembers her mother, Gherland, and Antain. For Luna, these memories function in much the same way as the memory visions do for the

**Related Characters:** Xan, Luna

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** Chapter 19. In Which There Is a Journey to the Town of Agony 164

### Explanation and Analysis

On their way home from a trip to the Free Cities, Luna and Xan purposefully don't speak about Luna's memories of her mother or Xan's failing health. By turning the weight of things unspoken into something tangible, the narrator assigns real consequences to not having an open and communicative relationship between child and caregiver. Luna feels stifled and ignored because she can't share these memories with Xan and get any help making sense of them, while Xan feels compelled to lie about Luna's memories and about her own failing health in a misguided attempt to keep Luna's world happy and uncomplicated. Further, the way that the narrator describes these tangible consequences suggests that at a certain point, censorship and silence

breed sorrow—something that, within the logic of the novel, is dangerous in large quantities and has even greater negative effects than silence alone.

## Chapter 22 Quotes

☞☞ *They say she even stole it from the moon. And then she cast a spell over all of us—a great cloud of sorrow, covering the world.*

*Well, of course it covers the world. That's why the world is drab and gray. That's why hope is only for the smallest of children. Best you learn that now.*

**Related Characters:** The Parent (speaker), Sister Ignatia/The Sorrow Eater

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 22. In Which There Is Another Story182

### Explanation and Analysis

The parent explains how the Witch got her magic by stealing from other magicians and from the moon. The child's unspoken question is significant here; they presumably asked the parent something like, "does the cloud of sorrow really cover the whole world?" Because of what the narrator shares with the reader, it's clear that the cloud of sorrow doesn't actually cover the entire world. This disconnect between the truth and characters' misunderstanding of the world around them helps the reader see how the stories of the Witch actually push a very specific worldview onto listeners, one that teaches them that there's no point in fighting their situation because nothing is any better anywhere else. By stamping out these questions in children, Sister Ignatia's stories also bring up the next generation of unthinking, sad Protectorate inhabitants, thereby perpetuating the cycle of silence and sadness.

## Chapter 28 Quotes

☞☞ While it was annoying to have to go hungry in one's own home, there was always sorrow aplenty throughout the Protectorate, hanging over the town like a cloud.

Or normally there was. But this blasted *hope* stirred up by Antain was spreading through the town, disrupting the sorrow. Sister Ignatia felt her stomach rumble.

**Related Characters:** Antain, Grand Elder Gherland, The Madwoman/Adara, Sister Ignatia/The Sorrow Eater

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** Chapter 28. In Which Several People Go into the Woods230

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains how the madwoman learns to stop up her sorrow, meaning that Sister Ignatia cannot feed on her sadness—and unfortunately for Sister Ignatia, Antain's hope is damaging her other stores of sustenance. This lays out clearly that within the world of the novel, hope is the direct opposite of sorrow. For someone in Sister Ignatia's position, this means that hope is a dangerous thing that should be stamped out at all costs—hence the morals of many of the parent's stories, which teach children that bravery is useless and that there's no point in trying to do any better. Antain's hope becomes radical and gives him the power and the tools to start asking questions and ultimately, to oust Sister Ignatia from her powerful perch. According to the novel, then, hope can be a form of empowerment that allows people to stand up against being unjustly censored and controlled.

## Chapter 29 Quotes

☞☞ *But the volcano never really went out. The wizard stopped it up, but it went underground. And it leaks its fury into the water pools and the mud vats and the noxious vents. It poisons the Bog. It contaminates the water. It is the reason why our children go hungry and our grandmothers wither and our crops are so often doomed to fail. It is the reason we cannot ever leave this place and there is no use trying.*

**Related Characters:** The Parent (speaker), Sister Ignatia/The Sorrow Eater, Fyrian's Mother, Zosimos

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 29. In Which There Is a Story with a Volcano in It242

### Explanation and Analysis

The parent tells their child about how the volcano's thwarted eruption made the volcano contaminate the forest and the Bog, and why it's the reason for the sadness in the Protectorate. In this instance, the volcano acts as a symbol

for sorrow and hopelessness. It poisons everything and makes it so that people are unable to consider the possibility of doing better for themselves—their sadness, and thus the collective sorrow that grips the Protectorate, is actually what keeps people from being successful, not the volcano. Further, notice that the moral of this story is that it's pointless to try to leave the Protectorate. Sister Ignatia, the mastermind behind this story, certainly knows that there are places out there where people are happy and thriving—but if she were to lose people to those places, she'd lose her grip on the population and consequentially lose her power. With this, the novel shows yet again how twisting a story just a little bit and distancing it from the truth allows someone like Sister Ignatia to remain in power by scaring people.

## Chapter 33 Quotes

☝☝ Antain kneeled down. “I’m sorry,” he breathed. “I’m so, so sorry.” He scooped up the bird in his hands. It didn’t look healthy. How could it, in these cursed woods? Half the water was poisoned. The Witch. It all came back to the Witch. Curse her name forever.

**Related Characters:** Antain (speaker), Xan

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 33. In Which the Witch Encounters an Old Acquaintance265

### Explanation and Analysis

After accidentally throwing a rock at Xan, who’s in the form of a sparrow, Antain rescues her and curses the Witch for poisoning everything in the forest. Antain doesn’t have all the information here. Xan is old and unwell; her poor health has nothing to do with a witch and everything to do with Luna’s growing magic. Because of this, it’s easy to see how the fictional story of the Witch has affected Antain’s worldview profoundly and has made it so that he’s unable to consider that there may be other explanations for what’s going on. This is heightened by the fact that the reader knows that Antain is holding a witch, not a common sparrow—but because of his life of censorship in the Protectorate, Antain doesn’t have the critical thinking skills to consider what might be true. His ignorance then, further highlights the power of stories to keep people ignorant and subdue them into being controlled.

## Chapter 38 Quotes

☝☝ A story can tell the truth, she knew, but a story can also lie. Stories can bend and twist and obfuscate. Controlling stories is power indeed. And who would benefit most from such a power? And over time, Ethyne’s eye drifted less and less toward the forest, and more toward the Tower casting its shadow over the Protectorate.

**Related Characters:** Sister Ignatia/The Sorrow Eater, Ethyne

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 38. In Which the Fog Begins to Lift309

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains how Ethyne began to change her thinking during her time in the tower, and ultimately began to suspect that the Witch was with her in the Tower, not in the forest. Most importantly, Ethyne draws out the connection between controlling stories and gaining power, which encourages her to look closely at the stories she grew up with and begin to consider the ways in which they may have been twisted to promote a certain agenda. This shows that, for someone like Ethyne who is naturally hopeful, it’s far easier to develop critical thinking skills that in turn allow her to engage more critically with life in the Protectorate, and ultimately come to the conclusion that what she’s been told is true all her life actually isn’t. Because Ethyne has this ability and makes these connections, she’s then also able to help others develop hope and critical thinking skills, which ultimately creates an environment in which the Protectorate can overthrow the Sisters and the Council.

☝☝ “Today the doors are opening.”

“Even to the library?” Wyn said hopefully.

“Especially the library. Knowledge is powerful, but it is a terrible power when it is hoarded and hidden. Today, knowledge is for everyone.” She hooked her arm in Wyn’s, and they hurried through the Tower, unlocking doors.

**Related Characters:** Wyn, Ethyne (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** Chapter 38. In Which the Fog Begins to Lift312

### Explanation and Analysis

During Ethyne's takeover of the Tower, she and Wyn go through and open up the Tower's libraries to the public for the first time. By doing this, Ethyne and Wyn create an environment in which every person will have access to knowledge and can then begin to come to their own conclusions about how the world works. By creating a more enlightened and critical society, Ethyne gives the populace the tools to overthrow Sister Ignatia and the Council by discovering that the stories they promote aren't truthful and instead, only exist to keep those in power powerful. Wyn's attitude to unlocking the doors shows that this knowledge is linked to hope, and with both information and hope, people can begin to question the narratives they've been told, thwart censorship, and give themselves more power over their own lives.

☞ But as the clouds broke and the sky began to clear, they found themselves feeling something else, too. Something they had never felt before.

*Here is the baby holding her own sweet baby. My grandchild. Here is her knowing that no one will ever take that child away.*

Hope. They felt hope.

*Here is the baby in his circle of friends. He is laughing. He loves his life.*

Joy. They felt joy.

**Related Characters:** Antain, Ethyne

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 38. In Which the Fog Begins to Lift314

### Explanation and Analysis

While Sister Ignatia is in the woods seeking out Antain, the clouds of sorrow in the Protectorate begin to lift, and women who lost babies to the sacrifice inexplicably experience visions of their children growing up accompanied by happiness and hope. The fact that these women feel these emotions as they see their children happy in their new lives suggests that experiencing and treasuring familial love is one of the most effective ways to foster hope

and happiness in oneself. While this isn't something that these women can control necessarily, thinking about their children shows them both that Sister Ignatia's stories about the Witch weren't true—their children are alive—and that if they can create hope and happiness for themselves, and can begin to question what they've been told.

## Chapter 39 Quotes

☞ “I don't know, my dear Fyrian. What I do know is that I am here with you. I do know that the gaps in our knowledge will soon be revealed and filled in, and that's a good thing. I do know that you are my friend and that I will stay by your side through every transition and trial.”

**Related Characters:** Glerk (speaker), Fyrian

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** Chapter 39. In Which Glerk Tells Fyrian the Truth332

### Explanation and Analysis

During Glerk and Fyrian's journey to help Xan, Fyrian begins to grow at an alarming rate, and Glerk comforts him. It's important to keep in mind that while Glerk has engaged in some self-censorship over the course of the novel, he hasn't been subjected to the same kind of censorship that those in the Protectorate have. Because of this, he has the ability and the willingness to understand that while he might not know something now, he'll soon be able to figure it out. Nothing stands in the way of him doing so, the way that Sister Ignatia and her stories stood in the way of those in the Protectorate figuring out the truth. Then, by vowing to always be Fyrian's friend no matter what, Glerk creates a safe space for Fyrian to also be comfortable not knowing, and to know that he will one day be able to know. This represents a healthier way of protecting people from difficult information than the systemic censorship and horrors of the Protectorate.

## Chapter 40 Quotes

☞ “How do you know that name?” Sister Ignatia whispered. “Everyone knows that name,” the madwoman said. “It was in a story. About how the Witch ate a tiger's heart. They all whisper it. It's wrong, of course. You don't have a tiger's heart. You have no heart at all.”

“There is no such story,” Sister Ignatia said. [...] “I started the stories in the Protectorate. *I did*. They all came from me. There is no story that I did not tell first.”

**Related Characters:** The Madwoman/Adara, Sister Ignatia/The Sorrow Eater (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 40. In Which There Is a Disagreement about Boots329

### Explanation and Analysis

When Sister Ignatia and the madwoman confront each other over the madwoman stealing Sister Ignatia's Seven League Boots, the madwoman calls Sister Ignatia "Tiger's Heart," and they discuss the stories in the Protectorate. When Sister Ignatia admits that she started all the stories, including those about the Witch, it's damning for her—it proves without a doubt that the Protectorate has been under an intense censorship campaign for the last 500 years, and that that campaign benefited Sister Ignatia and others in power.

The revelation that there are stories in the Protectorate that Sister Ignatia didn't start is a major threat to her grasp on power. If other people have the ability to tell stories, they have the ability to mold their reality and tell stories that work better for them, rather than retell stories that just serve Sister Ignatia. This shows that Sister Ignatia is now having to reckon with the true power of stories, but from the other side. Now, she understands that stories will bring her down, just as they brought her to power to begin with.

### Chapter 45 Quotes

☝☝ How many feelings can one heart hold? She looked at her grandmother. At her mother. At the man protecting his family. *Infinite*, Luna thought. *The way the universe is infinite*. It is light and dark and endless motion; it is space and time, and space within space, and time within time. And she knew: *there is no limit to what the heart can carry*.

**Related Characters:** Antain, The Madwoman/Adara, Xan, Sister Ignatia/The Sorrow Eater, Luna

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 45. In Which a Simply Enormous Dragon Makes a Simply Enormous Decision364

### Explanation and Analysis

While Luna examines the pearl that is Sister Ignatia's heart and considers the power of emotions, she comes to the conclusion that hearts can always hold more. This forms an important element of the novel's main argument: families, it shows through Xan's practice of adopting out the Star Children, can always get bigger, and this doesn't take away from the bond between Star Children and their birth or their adoptive parents. In this particular situation, Luna starts to understand that her love for Xan and her love for her birth mother don't have to exist in opposition to each other. Rather, both relationships are equally valid, and she can love both of them without having to compromise.

### Chapter 46 Quotes

☝☝ "I was taken from my mother," Luna explained. "Like you, I was brought to a family who loved me and whom I love. I cannot stop loving that family, and I don't want to. I can only allow my love to increase." She smiled. "I love the grandmother who raised me. I love the mother I lost. My love is boundless. My heart is infinite. And my joy expands and expands. You'll see."

**Related Characters:** Luna (speaker), Xan, The Madwoman/Adara

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** Chapter 46. In Which Several Families Are Reunited377

### Explanation and Analysis

Following the volcano's eruption, Luna makes trips to the Free Cities to tell the Star Children where they came from and to encourage them to visit their birth families in the Protectorate. In doing this, Luna reiterates the idea that people can always open up their hearts to more people, especially when it comes to families built via adoption. It's not necessary, Luna suggests, for the Star Children to pledge themselves entirely to their adoptive families, or to abandon their adoptive families for their birth families. Instead, it's more than possible to allow love to grow and expand to encompass all parts of their families and create a rich and vast familial network. This acceptance of different kinds of families will provide even more love and support in the long run.



## 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 1. IN WHICH A STORY IS TOLD

The parent tells their child that “of course” there’s a witch in the woods. Nobody has ever seen the **Witch** and nobody ever will—they’ve taken steps to make sure of it. The parent doesn’t know why the Witch wants children, and reminds the child that the witch absolutely exists—the dangerous woods are proof of this. The parent refuses to explain what will happen if they stop appeasing the Witch and admits that years ago, their baby boy was sacrificed. The parent sends their child to do chores. Tomorrow is the Day of Sacrifice. The parent says that they couldn’t have fought for their son, and that it’s impossible to change the way the world works.

*Introducing the novel with this story by the parent sets the stage for how the Protectorate (where the parent lives) functions: it’s a place that’s terrified of the Witch. Note in particular that the parent says that they couldn’t have fought for their son, and that it’s impossible to change. Later, the reader will learn that this isn’t actually true—this belief is one that those in power promote to remain in power, showing how effective storytelling is as a means of controlling people.*



## CHAPTER 2. IN WHICH AN UNFORTUNATE WOMAN GOES QUITE MAD

On the morning of the Day of Sacrifice, Grand Elder Gherland takes his time checking his reflection in the mirror. He loves his mirror, the only one in the Protectorate, and he feels it’s important to give the populace a show. The Protectorate sits between a dangerous forest and a huge bog, which provides a meager livelihood for most people. They can harvest parts of the Zirin plant, as well as other magical plants, which are then transported to the Free Cities on the other side of the Forest via the Road. The Elders own the Road, which is the only safe passage through the forest. The Elders also own the Bog, the houses, and the gardens, which is why they’re rich and fat. The people can only hope that the Bog will save them.

*Gherland’s love of pomp and circumstance, combined with the fact that as an Elder, he owns nearly everything in the Protectorate, situates him as someone in love with his title and all that it brings him. The narration shows clearly that the general populace is poor and has access to few real resources, while the Elders have access to natural resources as well as manual laborers. This shows some of the reasons why the Elders want to promote stories like the parent’s from the last chapter: it keeps them in power, and the population hopeless.*



Gherland hears a knock on the door. His annoyingly enthusiastic nephew, Antain, bursts in. Antain is an Elder-in-Training because Antain’s mother, a ridiculous woman, begged Gherland to take him on. Gherland is fond of Antain, but Antain has a habit of asking questions and if he continues, Gherland will have to deal with him. Gherland snaps for Antain to calm down. Antain says that the other Elders are ready and the populace is assembled along the route. Nobody is shirking after last year. This saddens Gherland; he likes teaching the people lessons.

*Gherland’s fondness for Antain makes it clear that despite his many horrible traits, Gherland is capable of feeling love and affection for another person. This makes him a more relatable villain and suggests that everyone, villain or not, is capable of feeling love. Gherland’s desire to teach people lessons, meanwhile, shows again that he’s drunk on his power and will probably do anything to keep it.*



Usually, the Day of Sacrifice is solemn and goes off without a hitch. Sad parents hand over their babies. This year looks different. Gherland frowns when he hears the mother howling from a street away. At the family's house, a man outside has a bloody and scratched face. He apologizes and says that his wife seems mad. Inside, the mother hangs from the rafters, nursing her baby and shrieking threats at the Elders. They stare at her openmouthed; nobody ever fights for the sacrificial child. Antain begins to cry but tries to hide it.

Gherland pretends to be compassionate and clarifies that the Elders aren't taking the baby; the **Witch** is taking the baby. When the mother growls again, Gherland tells the man that his wife is mad and needs care. The mother climbs higher in the rafters and says that if the Elders take her daughter, she'll find her daughter and steal her back. Gherland laughs at the idea of anyone taking on the Witch and calls in the guards. The guards, trained Sisters of the Star, quickly separate mother and baby, and take the mother to the Tower.

The Sisters hand the baby to Gherland. The baby whimpers for a moment and then stares solemnly at him. Her gaze makes him uncomfortable. He notices that the baby has a crescent moon-shaped birthmark on her forehead which, according to lore, means that she's special. Gherland hates lore, especially when it lets people think that they're better than they actually are. The baby sticks out her tongue and then urinates, offending Gherland and wetting his robes. Gherland leads the Elders through the town with the baby.

Outside the city walls, the Elders begin to move quickly. Nobody likes being in the dangerous forest. They follow a trail until they reach a hollow surrounded by five sycamore trees. Gherland isn't sure if he remembers right how many trees there are, as this year, there are six. He chalks it up to nervousness and sets the baby down. The Elders turn to retreat, but Antain asks if they really just leave the baby. He suggests that they should wait to make sure the **Witch** gets the baby, rather than wild animals. Gherland shuts Antain down and leads him back to the Protectorate. The narrator explains that the Elders all know that animals *will* get the baby, as there is no witch. Belief in the Witch keeps people subdued, frightened, and sad, which allows the Elders to keep control.

*When the narrator notes that nobody ever fights for the sacrificial child, it's worth asking why this is. Remember the parent's story to their child: it's likely that parents in the Protectorate believe there's simply no chance that they'll be successful, so they resign themselves to their grief and don't fight for their children. This woman's resistance, then, suggests that there is some room for people to hope for a better life.*



*By making it very clear that he's not actually at fault here, Gherland uses storytelling to his advantage to mold the truth. Of course the Elders are taking this woman's baby; this fact isn't negated by the Elders passing the baby along to someone else. Blaming the Witch, however, allows Gherland to align himself with this mother as a victim of the practice.*



*Gherland's hatred of lore that makes people think that they're special shows that he understands the power of stories—even questionably true legends, as his tone regarding lore implies. For Gherland, it's dangerous if the population thinks that they're special, as they might then pull stunts like this woman did and try to fight for their babies.*



*The revelation that there is no witch who demands a sacrifice shows clearly that the Elders simply use the story and the Day of Sacrifice as a way to maintain control over the Protectorate. In other words, they rely on the power of storytelling to feed the population a tale designed to stoke their fears and make them sad, which in turn makes them less likely to ask questions. After all, they need to constantly be able to appease the Witch. Antain's question and his youthful idealism suggest that questioning like this is something that, if Antain continues, has the power to change things.*



## CHAPTER 3. IN WHICH A WITCH ACCIDENTALLY ENMAGICS AN INFANT

There's a noxious, sulfurous swamp in the middle of the forest. A few days before the Day of Sacrifice, which is known as Star Child Day elsewhere, an old witch named Xan leans on a staff and bellows at the swamp monster, Glerk, to resurface and apologize. Xan is the **Witch**, and that she's too young to have any real power over Glerk. Glerk surfaces, rolls his eyes, and points out that he's millennia older than she is, and that the Poet always said he doesn't care about what she thinks. Glerk apologizes to Xan and drags himself out of the muck as Xan accuses Glerk of being mean to Fyrian, a sensitive dragonling who is "just a baby."

Glerk points out that Fyrian is *also* older than Xan and starts to say that it's time for something, but Xan cuts him off. Glerk says that Fyrian has incorrectly believed for centuries that he's a Simply Enormous Dragon when in reality, he's a Perfectly Tiny Dragon. Xan says that she promised Fyrian's mother, but Glerk says that it's time for Fyrian to know the truth. Curling his tail around him, Glerk insists that things are changing, but Xan pleads with him to apologize so she can leave. Glerk allows Xan to put a hand on his huge cheek, asks her to be careful, and promises to continue to lie to Fyrian.

Xan sprints into the forest. While the forest is dangerous due to the sleeping volcano under it, it's not magical or cursed. For most people, the Road is the only safe passage, but Xan hasn't taken the Road in centuries since "thugs and bullies" from the Protectorate charge too much. For several centuries, Xan has gone to the Protectorate yearly to rescue a baby that mothers inexplicably leave in the forest. Xan doesn't judge and just accepts the responsibility of keeping the babies out of the mouths of wild beasts. She takes them to the Free Cities, where children are treasured.

As Xan approaches the Protectorate and feels the sadness settling on her, she reminds herself to grab the baby and go quickly. She's prepared with diapers, blankets, and a few bottles of goat's milk. When the milk runs out, she feeds the babies starlight. When Xan arrives in the Free Cities with the babies, the people there see the babies as a blessing. Xan finds the babies perfect adoptive families, and the so-called Star Children grow up to be generous and loved.

*Discovering that there is a witch—but that she's a kind one who believes in fairness and compassion—complicates the reader's understanding of the story. This, along with the aside about Star Child Day, opens up the possibility that wild animals don't get the sacrificed babies—they possibly go elsewhere. Xan's ability to extract an apology from Glerk when she shouldn't have any power over him speaks to the power of compassion and kindness, suggesting that those qualities are more powerful than age.*



*In this instance, Glerk stands up for free knowledge and against censorship—Xan's choice to make Fyrian believe that he's Simply Enormous is its own kind of censorship, though one that she does because she believes that it's going to help Fyrian. That Glerk still takes issue with it suggests that when it comes to censorship, intentions don't actually matter. It's better, the novel suggests, to know, than to receive filtered or inaccurate information—even if that altered information might make things easier.*



*The way that Xan describes the "thugs and bullies" shows how individual differences in perspective can dramatically change someone's perception of a story. The thugs are, presumably, the Elders who own the road, but the Elders certainly wouldn't use this kind of language to talk about themselves. This shift in perspective happens again when Xan believes that mothers abandon their babies. This shows that Xan will need to form a more complete understanding of what's going on if she wishes to truly make a difference.*



*The way that Xan goes about saving and then finding families for these children speaks to the power of adoption to improve the lives of children and parents. It suggests that people don't need to share blood to be family—these children grow up to have full lives and aren't damaged in any way by their adoption.*



At the grove, Xan turns herself into a tree to sleep. She sleeps through the Elders leaving the baby and Antain's questions and only wakes when the baby starts to wail. Xan carefully turns herself back into a human and scoops up the baby, who has an unsettling gaze that pulls at Xan's heart. Xan pulls out a bottle and sits down to feed the baby, who continues to stare at Xan. Xan tells the baby that her new family will love her very much, but it makes Xan's heart hurt. As she continues to talk, Xan feels less sure about taking her to the Free Cities. Xan makes a number of detours and takes the baby to see all sorts of beautiful sights.

After 10 days, Xan is about a quarter of the way to the Free Cities. She reaches up that night to gather starlight, but she doesn't pay attention to the moon. The narrator explains that the magic in starlight is diffused, so it's just enough to awaken the best in a baby's heart and soul. Moonlight, however, is pure magic and can enmagic a baby. Xan stares into the baby's eyes as she puts her hand up. She doesn't notice how heavy and sticky the moonlight is and feeds it to the baby. Xan doesn't realize her mistake until the baby shudders, cries, and falls asleep.

Xan knows the baby has been enmagicked and sits down. She can feel the baby's magic and knows that in time, the baby will become unstable. She remembers her teacher Zosimos telling her about the dangers of enmagicking a baby and likening it to giving a toddler a sword. Xan knows she can't leave the baby with anyone now. She names the baby Luna, declares that she'll be Luna's grandmother, and says they'll be a family. The words are stronger than magic.

## CHAPTER 4. IN WHICH IT WAS JUST A DREAM

The parent chastises the child for asking too many questions about what the **Witch** does to the kidnapped children. They say that people can't ask because it hurts too much. They recount how their mother believed that the Witch eats children's souls, while their grandmother believed that the Witch keeps kids as slaves. In both cases, the parent believes that the children would've escaped and returned, so neither story must be true. The parent says that sometimes, they dream about their baby who was sacrificed. He'd be 18 now, and the parent had a dream that their son kissed a girl. The parent denies that they're crying.

*For Xan, this infant is different, and impresses upon her the importance of showering the Star Children with love and affection while she has them in her care. This is both a sorrowful and a hopeful time for Xan, as she still believes that she's going to have to find this baby a home in the Free Cities, while some part of her likely hopes that it'll be possible to keep closer ties. This shows how hope and sorrow can be closely entwined, and that when they are, it isn't necessarily a bad thing.*



*The fact that Xan feeds the abandoned children on starlight, which blesses them, offers yet another redemptive and positive angle on adoption: because these children are abandoned and then adopted, they're even more compassionate and kind than their peers in the Free Cities. This shows that positive things can come from tragedy, which is what the Day of Sacrifice truly is.*



*When the narrator suggests that Xan's words are stronger than magic, it shows how easy it is for someone to create their own chosen family—all it takes is a decision and saying it. With this, the novel shows that chosen families are just as strong and as valid as blood families; they just rely on love, instead of genetic relation, to bind them.*



*Because the parent often takes a brisk tone with the child, it's telling here that they get teary at the thought of their grown son moving through life. This suggests that the grief of losing a child isn't something that disappears, at least in the Protectorate—it's still raw enough to make parents cry two decades later. This means that there are a number of other parents who also live with this grief, something that will inevitably drag down morale in the Protectorate and potentially lead to a change in the practice of sacrificing babies.*



## CHAPTER 5. IN WHICH A SWAMP MONSTER ACCIDENTALLY FALLS IN LOVE

Glerk doesn't approve of Luna, but Fyrian loves Luna immediately and sings off-key to her every chance he gets. Within two weeks, their home is transformed. Glerk steps over sharp toys and is told to leave so he doesn't wake or frighten Luna. By the end of the third week, Glerk is done. He forbids Xan from loving Luna and asks if she's aware of what the Poet says about Witches raising children. Xan sarcastically says that it's surely insightful. Glerk approaches and looks at the smiling, drooling baby. He tries not to smile and thinks that she's being cute to spite him. He tells himself not to fall in love and then tells Xan that the Poet says nothing about babies and Witches.

This delights Xan, but Glerk says that she's missing the point. Xan insists that Glerk is missing Luna's babyhood by being so miserable, and Glerk feels heartbroken when he sees how upset Xan is with him. Fyrian perches on Xan's shoulder so he doesn't get too close to Luna. This is for safety: Fyrian often hiccups fire, and Luna's magic might explode at any minute and hurt Fyrian. As Fyrian sneezes flame onto Xan's hair, Xan asks Glerk to take Fyrian for a walk.

Glerk rolls his eyes at Fyrian's attempts to pick flowers for Luna (Fyrian lights them on fire every few minutes) and brushes off Fyrian's incessant questions about wanting to see the "giants." The narrator explains that Fyrian is the size of a dove, but he believes that he's huge and that Xan and Glerk are giants. This is because Fyrian's mother told him that he would be a giant before she dove into the volcano. To avoid Fyrian, Glerk pretends to nap in the bog.

Soon, Fyrian is tired of all the noise that Luna makes and begs Xan to "magic her quiet." Xan refuses on the grounds that it's unethical to influence another person's will, so Luna babbles, screeches, and cries. Glerk makes a sling and carries Luna around the swamp while reciting poetry. He tried to not love her, but she says "Glerk" one day, which makes Glerk's heart want to burst. Xan and Glerk watch for Luna's magic. They can both see it, and the moon feeds Luna at every opportunity. Luna's magic doubles yearly as she grows into a curious, energetic, and naughty child. Xan eventually decides to stop worrying. Glerk suggests teaching Luna poetry, Fyrian wants to teach her math, and Xan decides to teach her science. Glerk whispers poems to her as she sleeps.

*Later, the reader will learn that Glerk actually is the Poet—and in that sense, he can write whatever he'd like to about babies and Witches. His choice to say nothing about it suggests that Luna is beginning to get to him and warm his heart. In this way, the novel continues to show that love is what makes a family: as Glerk grows to love Luna, their familial ties will become even stronger and more meaningful.*



*While Glerk isn't sad, per se, his crotchiness is still negative—and Xan makes it clear that dwelling on negative emotions is going to do nothing but keep Glerk from experiencing positive ones. This suggests that people have a choice: they can dwell in their negative emotions and miss out, or they can choose to be hopeful and happy, and to experience all that life has to offer.*



*Xan's choice to lie to Fyrian, while questionable, shows that she does place a lot of importance on the relationship between mother and child. In this case, she's willing to spin elaborate lies all for the sake of making Fyrian feel as though his mother didn't lie to him.*



*That Glerk whispers poems to Luna so often makes it clear that he has come to love her. Specifically, the fact that he's reciting poetry to her shows that he wants her to know all that she possibly can—and introducing her to his poetry is a way for Luna to steep herself in the past and in a different form of storytelling. Xan's insistence that she can't make Luna be quiet shows that at this point, sticking to her principles is easy, as noise is a relatively trivial and lighthearted problem.*



## CHAPTER 6. IN WHICH ANTAIN GETS HIMSELF IN TROUBLE

Antain spends his first five years as an Elder-in-Training trying to convince himself that his job will get easier. It never does. The Elders berate him every chance they get and for seemingly no reason. Antain's mother does the same at home and insists that she deserves the honor of Antain being an Elder. Antain isn't sure. Antain escapes his mother to help the kitchen staff and the gardeners, and then goes to the shed to carve wood, which he loves doing. He tries not to think about the approaching Day of Sacrifice.

The next morning, Antain goes to the Council Hall to go through citizen complaints and requests, pick out a few important ones, and erase the rest. Once, when he suggested that all the complaints might be important, Gherland insisted that refusing to listen to the people is a gift—it teaches the people that their lives are inconsequential. Antain then prepares the Council rooms and goes to school. It's an uncharacteristically sunny day and Antain marvels that nobody is out to enjoy the sunlight. It feels hopeful. He looks toward the Tower, where the madwoman has lived for five years now. He can't get her face or her baby's face out of his head, and he can't forgive himself. He feels there has to be another way.

Antain arrives at school early. He pulls out his journal and works on a plan for a wheeled cabinet for the kind gardener, but Gherland interrupts him and calls him to his office. He insists that school is pointless for Antain, since its point is to amuse children until they can be useful to the Protectorate. Antain knows that he won't be missed; his teacher gives him high marks no matter what he does, and nobody talks to him. The only person with whom he'd like to speak left school to join the Sisters of the Star last year. Her name is Ethyne. Nobody leaves the Sisters of the Star, but Antain hopes she will anyway.

Antain continues to think of the madwoman as Gherland says that the Day of Sacrifice is coming. He lists all the ways that Antain has gotten out of participating in the last few years, from getting suspicious illnesses to fighting suspicious fires singlehandedly. Gherland points out that Antain isn't fooling anyone, and says that he gave Antain this position against his better judgment. He likes Antain, but Gherland says that he can't protect him forever. Antain doesn't understand why he needs to be protected in the first place as he shuffles out the door. Gherland lifts a hand to put it on Antain's shoulder, but decides not to. Five days later, Antain is home vomiting as the Elders sacrifice another baby. Gherland worries about him.

*This passage makes it clear that Antain is idealistic and hopeful, qualities that aren't celebrated in the Protectorate. This makes his life even harder because at this point, he's in the minority when he hopes that things will get better. His attempts to not think about the Day of Sacrifice are attempts to prevent it from being solidified as a real thing in his mind, a form of self-censorship.*



*Gherland's unwillingness to listen to people's complaints and requests shows another way that the Elders censor the population and thus keep themselves in power. It's likely that even those requests that Gherland does look at won't ever incite any change—rather, Gherland likely considers them at all only so that the Council of Elders looks like it cares and will do something, rather than because either of those things are true.*



*Gherland's comment about the purpose of the Protectorate's school implies that students there aren't actually getting an education. This makes it clear that school, like the wall for complaints, is just a show; students aren't graduating with critical thinking skills or the belief that they can make a difference in the world. Instead, they likely graduate with only the bare minimum that they need to function as adults.*



*That Antain is haunted by his memories of the madwoman and of Luna shows how dwelling on sad memories like this can make a person less receptive or reactive to things that are happening around them in real time. Because Antain is so caught up in his memories and is so sad, he's unable to grasp that Gherland is trying to do him a big favor here by telling him to get in line—the implication is that if Antain won't shape up, he'll probably be killed. This also gives another positive and nuanced layer to Gherland's villainous character, as he's likely not supposed to be this open with Antain.*



## CHAPTER 7. IN WHICH A MAGICAL CHILD IS MORE TROUBLE BY HALF

At five years old, Luna's magic has doubled five times. Glerk worries that she's going to burst at some point, but Xan suggests that maybe things will never be difficult. The narrator notes that while Xan loves finding homes for abandoned babies, she hates sad, hard, or unpleasant things. Later, Glerk rocks Luna to sleep and feels her magic pulsing. Xan tells him he's imagining things and focuses on raising Luna, who is a mischievous and curious child, magic or not.

Xan visits the Free Cities two times per year. She takes Luna once per year, but doesn't take her for Star Child Day, doesn't tell her about the abandoned babies, and doesn't tell her about the Protectorate. She knows that she'll have to tell Luna at some point, but she reasons that it's too sad and Luna is too little. On one trip with Luna, Xan tries to shrink a tumor in a woman's brain as Luna touches a lump of bread dough and says that it's a hat. Annoyed, Xan asks a boy to take Luna outside. Later, Xan sees that the bread dough actually *is* a hat—Luna's magic shimmers silver and blue around it.

Xan works quickly for the next few days as Luna wreaks havoc. She climbs to impossible heights and turns houses into birds, and she has no idea what she's doing. Xan cleans up after her and finally puts Luna to sleep with magic, which makes her feel horrible. Zosimos was very clear that Xan should never do something like that. Xan scoops up Luna and thinks that she's missing something and needs to remember her childhood, which was sad. She knows that sorrow is dangerous, but she doesn't know why. The narrator notes that 500 years is a lot to remember. Xan remembers flashes of a castle, scholars, and something scary. She knows there's something that she's supposed to remember.

## CHAPTER 8. IN WHICH A STORY CONTAINS A HINT OF TRUTH

The parent gruffly agrees to tell their child a story that they insist will make the child cry. It's about a castle in the woods where good witches and wizards live. The woods at this point aren't dangerous—the **Witch** cursed the wood some time after this. One day, the Witch rides in on a dragon, wearing big black boots. As she does, the rivers boil and the Bog becomes toxic. People die as ash and smoke cover the sky. One wizard stands up to the Witch. He runs at her, throws her off the dragon, and tosses the dragon into the volcano, stopping it up. The Witch kills him, and this is why it's no use being brave or standing up to the Witch. The parent insists that the story is true and threatens to send their child to the Witch if they don't behave.

*For Xan, finding the abandoned babies homes is a hopeful and positive thing because she chooses to focus on the families she's building in the Free Cities, not the trauma that parents in the Protectorate experience. This shows how someone can choose to actively reframe horrific experiences into something more positive.*



*Xan's thought process here shows that she loves Luna deeply—but regardless, not letting Luna know about the Star Children or the Protectorate means that Luna doesn't have the knowledge she needs to make sense of her place in the world. Again, this makes the case that a person's intentions don't matter when they're trying to censor information. No matter what, Luna will suffer because Xan chooses to keep things from her.*



*In this instance, Xan is forced to understand that forgetting is dangerous—it means that she doesn't have the tools to deal with Luna, and instead must resort to unethical behavior to get Luna to stop working magic. This makes the case that just as censorship keeps people from knowing how to most effectively move through the world, forgetting can do much the same thing—it's a form of self-censorship, especially in this case, when Xan seems to have willfully forgotten her past.*



*The castle is, presumably, the same one that Xan remembered flashes of in the previous chapter. This makes it clear that like the parent's other stories, this one is likely true in some ways, but seriously altered in others. By blaming the horrific events on the Witch, whoever is promoting this story is able to remain in the population's good graces, and instead channel their fear and fury at the Witch. Finally, note the moral of this story: that being brave is useless. This means that the population is being conditioned from an early age to believe that they can't free themselves from the Elders.*



## CHAPTER 9. IN WHICH SEVERAL THINGS GO WRONG

The journey home from the Free Cities is disastrous. Luna turns stumps into birds and a stream into cake. Xan is exhausted from having to clean up after her. Xan dreams that night of Zosimos explaining something to her, but she can't hear over the rumble of the volcano. Finally, Xan and Luna reach home. Glerk meets them and says seriously that Luna is complicated—he's been watching her silver and blue magic. As Luna runs to the swamp flowers blossom under her feet and she and Fyrian board a boat of her own making. Exhausted, Xan leans against Glerk.

Xan attempts to teach Luna to control her magic. When Xan was enmagicked at age 10, she was sad and grateful for Zosimos's guidance—he protected her from someone who loved sorrow—but at age five, Luna won't sit still. She refuses to focus and instead, makes objects dance and somehow breaks through a blocking spell that Xan places on her. Xan sends her outside and collapses in exhaustion. Over the next few days, Luna becomes even more uncontrollable. She accidentally makes one of Fyrian's wings disappear and Xan resorts to encasing the house and animals in bubbles to protect them. Luna pops them gleefully. Xan asks Glerk to take Fyrian away for safety and tries to hide her rattling breath from him.

As Xan follows Luna and undoes her magic, she grows increasingly weaker. Finally, Glerk reaches the end of his rope and returns to the swamp. As Luna greets him and says that he's as cute as a bunny, Glerk transforms into a fluffy bunny. Luna cries and Glerk, having no idea who he is, hops away. Xan finds Glerk and then tries and fails to make Luna understand that she turned Glerk into a bunny. Xan puts Luna to sleep, returns an unhappy Glerk to his regular form, and then says that she doesn't know how to teach Luna. She encases Luna in a cocoon and when Glerk expresses alarm, Xan sadly says that Zosimos used to do this to her.

Glerk sits heavily and says that he remembers now. He asks why he forgot. Xan points out that sorrow is dangerous, though she can't remember why, and she believes that they both got used to not remembering things. Glerk thinks there's more to this, but he leaves the subject alone. Xan tells Glerk to not let Fyrian touch Luna in her cocoon and says that she's going to the old castle, where she last saw Zosimos, Fyrian's mother, and the other witches and wizards. She knows she needs to remember things, even if it's sad.

*While the kind of magic that Xan has to perform seems understandably tiring, her exhaustion also seems out of proportion for such an accomplished witch. This suggests that there's even more that Xan needs to remember, as there's likely an underlying cause for her exhaustion. Luna's sense that everything is normal comes in part from the fact that Xan hasn't prepared her for this moment, meaning that Luna's in no state to hear that she needs to tone it down or accept that this isn't normal.*



*Xan's rattling breath and her inability to effectively place blocking spells on Luna shows again that there's more to this than the understandable exhaustion that accompanies raising a magical child. This makes it even clearer to the reader that Xan needs to remember something that she forgot so that she can figure out how to deal with Luna. This probably means doing things similar to how Zosimos did them, but since Xan barely remembers him, she can't put any of his methods into practice.*



*Now that Xan remembers a bit better, she likely understands that Zosimos may have encouraged her to be ethical at all times—while also understanding that there are times when it's necessary for someone's safety to put them in a cocoon like this. This helps Xan to understand that while Zosimos loved her, he wasn't perfect, and it also begins Xan's journey of remembering how exactly Zosimos taught her. If she can remember this, she can figure out how to handle Luna.*



*Xan and Glerk suggest here that when there's no need to dwell on sadness, it's normal to try to forget it—but even though it's normal to do this, it doesn't mean that this is a good practice. The fact that Xan can't remember why sorrow is dangerous suggests that there are more foes out there of whom Xan isn't yet aware.*



## CHAPTER 10. IN WHICH A WITCH FINDS A DOOR, AND A MEMORY, TOO

Xan follows the rock path up to the volcano's crater. There used to be a big Tower, but the Tower is gone and the castle is rubble. The circle of stones from the courtyard is gone except for one, and it takes Xan hours to find it. When she does, she finds a message that Zosimos carved: "Don't forget. I mean it." It's disappointing, and Xan doesn't know what she's supposed to remember. As she puts her forehead against the stone and apologizes to Zosimos, a surge of magic hits her and the stone opens to reveal steps. Suddenly, Xan remembers Zosimos warning her that sorrow was dangerous because "she" was still around, so Xan swallowed her sorrow and her memories.

Xan remembers how everyone in the castle ran into the forest when the volcano exploded. She put protective spells on them as Zosimos hid the castle within the stones and told her to not forget. She assured him that she wouldn't, but he insisted that she would. Zosimos told her that he was going to save people and hoped that Xan would go on to make sure they're thankful, though he knew she wouldn't. Then, he and Fyrian's mother, a Simply Enormous Dragon, leapt into the volcano and stopped the eruption. Xan realizes now that she did nothing to keep Zosimos's memory alive. She forgot him within a year and never found it strange. She wonders why her memories disappeared and why Zosimos hid the castle.

## CHAPTER 11. IN WHICH A WITCH COMES TO A DECISION

Xan grabs armloads of books, maps, recipes, and artwork and takes it all to her workshop. For nine days, Glerk watches from the windows as Xan experiments and makes notes. Fyrian expresses concern to Glerk one evening, and Glerk assures him that Xan is just unused to not knowing what to do. He offers Fyrian a poem from the Poet. Fyrian asks if the poem is real, and who made it. Glerk snaps that it's real and came from the Poet, the Bog, the World, and him, which are all the same thing. He refuses to explain himself.

At the end of nine days, Xan bursts out of her workshop and begins to map out a 13-pointed star on the ground. Glerk has no idea what Xan is talking about as she goes on about a clock on a 13-year cycle, which will go off when Luna reaches age 13. Glerk squints. Magic feels nonsensical to him. Xan continues and says that the spell will encase Luna's magic in a tiny grain in her brain. Glerk looks at Luna sleeping, and in a thick voice asks if it'll hurt her. Xan says that it'll just buy them time to teach her how to use her magic before it erupts. As Xan finishes the star, the air feels suddenly heavy.

*Xan's memory of Zosimos's warning makes it clear that there is someone else who has it out for Xan, and gains power by cultivating sorrow. This offers some explanation for why Xan has pushed her sorrow down—doing so means that she can more easily avoid this enemy. Again, this shows that there are a number of good reasons to forget and to self-censor, but it also makes the case that one can't completely forget if one wants to be able to use the past to influence the future.*



*This passage recalls the parent's story of the dragon being thrown into the volcano. Since Xan is a protagonist in the story, and a kind person, it's likely that her version of events is more accurate (though memories are fallible, Xan also has nothing to gain by twisting the truth at this point). This again shows that the stories the parent shares shouldn't be taken at face value, as they've been altered to control the Protectorate and keep people from questioning. Instead, people should ask questions, as Xan does here.*



*For five centuries, Fyrian has never really seen Xan have to grapple with anything difficult. This is a new experience for him, and given his sheltered life, it's likely very uncomfortable. Fyrian's reaction offers some insight into why Xan has kept the truth from him—if Xan struggling over a spell is his biggest worry, he's not worrying about much larger and more dangerous things out there.*



*The sense of purpose that Xan exhibits here shows how positive it can be for a person to remember their history and be able to use those memories to create the future. Xan now understands that she needs to partially censor Luna's magic so that Luna will be able to learn, offering the possibility that censorship does have its place. Glerk's uncertainty, however, suggests that Xan may be incorrect in her assumption that placing limitations on Luna is in the child's best interest.*



Glerk asks Xan if this will stop the fact that her magic is transferring to Luna and weakening Xan. Xan says that it'll slow it down until Luna turns 13, at which point Xan will die. She says that she'd rather do that than die slowly like Zosimos. Glerk wants to hug Xan, but he knows she wouldn't like it. Before Glerk places Luna in the center of the star, he asks Xan to confirm that this will work as planned. Xan insists that it will and that she'll be ready to die when Luna's magic erupts—500 years is more than enough of a life. As the smells in the air change, Luna cries out once. Glerk's heart cracks and he tries to keep it from breaking entirely.

*Glerk recognizes deep down that what Xan is doing to Luna is going to change her in major ways, even if they can't foresee those changes yet. While the consequences of this kind of censorship aren't explicitly stated, this makes it clear that there will be consequences regardless of Xan's good intentions. It's significant, then, that Xan is ready to die when Luna turns 13. This shows that it's possible to greet sad events with hope and understanding—and that doing so makes these sad events easier to handle.*



## CHAPTER 12. IN WHICH A CHILD LEARNS ABOUT THE BOG

The parent assures the child that the **Witch** doesn't live in the Bog—the Bog is entirely good, and with the Witch there it *wouldn't* be good, and people would've seen her. The parent insists that the Bog would cough the Witch out. The parent agrees to tell the child the story of how the world arose. In the beginning, there was only the Bog. The Bog, however, was lonely and wanted to see, walk, and sing. So it created a Beast and loved the Beast. The Beast wanted words to talk about how he felt, so there were words. With the Beast's words, the sun, the sky, and the forests were born. The parent says that this is why the Bog loves everyone, and why it's ridiculous to suggest that the Witch lives in the Bog.

*The Beast is, presumably, Glerk, since he previously told Fyrian that he's the Poet and the Bog all in one. This makes it clear that Glerk isn't just Xan's beloved swamp monster; he has a life and an identity outside of this small family that he's built for himself over the last 500 years. With this, the novel shows that stories can control (as well as simply alter) how listeners think of different characters. Hearing this version of the story makes it seem as though Glerk wouldn't ever live with Xan—when in fact, he does happily live with her.*



## CHAPTER 13. IN WHICH ANTAIN PAYS A VISIT

The Sisters of the Star always have an “apprentice.” He's always a young boy, and he's more like a servant. They hire him when he's nine and keep him for three years, and each boy is fired with the same note: “We had high hopes, but this one has disappointed us.” Some boys only stay days or weeks, but those that last longer are fired when they begin to realize how much knowledge is in the Tower's libraries. Antain was fired the day after the Sisters granted him access.

*It's telling that the Sisters fire their apprentice when he learns that there's a lot to discover in the Tower's libraries. This suggests that the apprentices may be some of the only people in the Protectorate aware of the possibility that the stories guiding the Protectorate aren't correct. But by keeping them from confirming this, the Sisters are able to maintain their power.*



The Tower, where the Sisters live, is in the center of the Protectorate. It's an intricate structure, with rooms everywhere and odd corridors designed to confuse. During Antain's time there, he learned all sorts of useful things, and the Sisters praised him. His firing still stings, years later. One day, Antain makes his excuses to the Elders and decides to visit the Sisters, who were an odd family for him while he was there. Rook, Antain's little brother, answers the Tower door and shows Antain to Sister Ignatia's office. Sister Ignatia is a formidable woman, but she liked Antain.

*Antain's sense that the Sisters were a family of sorts to him again makes it clear that people need not share blood to be family. It's possible to form a chosen family with anyone, as long as there's love and mutual caring involved. That Antain has the ability to forgive Sister Ignatia for firing him speaks to his capacity to forgive and think well of others, a quality that highlights his generous and hopeful nature.*



Sister Ignatia greets Antain warmly, invites him to sit on a chair covered in spiky vines, and shouts at Rook to bring tea and cookies. Antain feels a pang of shame at the fact that he was fired. Sister Ignatia asks Antain if he is married, and says that she can tell he's sweet on someone. Antain blushes, thinking of Ethyne, and says that the Council keeps him busy. Sister Ignatia seems to sneer at this. Antain says he's learning a lot but thinks of the screaming madwoman and abandoning the baby. He wonders why the Council won't answer his questions. Sister Ignatia says that she's surprised that Antain joined the Council, though she knows it was Antain's mother's idea. She says she thought he'd be a carpenter.

Rook stumbles in, spills the tea and cookies, and rushes away. When Sister Ignatia asks, Antain insists that he's just here to visit. With a smile, Sister Ignatia says that Antain is lying and says that she understands why he'd want to see the madwoman, who is "a fountain of sorrow." Antain asks if she can be cured, but Sister Ignatia insists that there's no cure for sorrow and grins an odd smile. Antain points out that most people who lose children aren't this sad, but Sister Ignatia says that with this woman's madness, she's very interesting. Sister Ignatia icily reminds Antain that as an Elder-in-Training, he can see prisoners whenever he wants and doesn't need to go through her to do so.

Sister Ignatia leads Antain to the prison cells and Antain hopefully peeks into rooms looking for Ethyne. They reach the prison floor and Sister Ignatia leaves Antain with a Sister. The Sister confirms that Antain doesn't have any paper and then shows him into the cell. Antain is shocked: paper is exceedingly expensive and yet, the madwoman's cell is filled with thousands of **paper birds**. They're beautiful. The madwoman stirs. Antain barely recognizes her with her hair shaved and the brightness in her eyes gone. The woman says that Antain looks familiar as Antain notices maps that all say, "she is here."

Antain explains that he's an Elder-in-Training. The madwoman lies back down and laughs, which makes Antain shiver. Suddenly, Antain notices that the **paper birds** are all facing him. The madwoman slowly tells Antain to tell Gherland that "she" is here and terrible. Antain doesn't know what this means, and thinks that the woman is too mad to reason with. The madwoman says that her daughter isn't dead and Antain points out that she shouldn't be—they don't know what the **Witch** does with the children. One of the woman's paper hummingbirds crawls into Antain's shirt and pokes him, and a paper raven cuts Antain's cheek. The woman says that the reckoning is coming. Antain pounds on the door, but his words and fists make no sound. Hundreds of paper birds attack him.

*Everything about Sister Ignatia and her office is designed to intimidate and make guests feel horrible—this is likely why Antain feels guilt about being fired, even though the same thing happens to everyone. Again, when he dwells on the madwoman and the abandoned baby, it shows that he's far too curious and compassionate to believe the Elders at face value that this is the way things must be. His questioning nature puts him at risk, but it also means that he has the potential to bring about great change.*



*Xan's constant refrain that sorrow is dangerous takes on new significance in the context of Sister Ignatia's hints about the madwoman's sorrow. Sister Ignatia's odd smile suggests that she's gaining something from the madwoman's sorrow—in other words, she has something to gain by making people sad and keeping them that way. This begins to point to her as the person who's actually benefiting from the stories that the parent tells, while the Elders may be just as fooled as the rest of the Protectorate.*



*It's important to remember that Antain actually takes note of the madwoman's birds, and what her maps say. This shows first that Antain is open and interested in other people—he doesn't move through the world trying to see people merely as he wants them to be. It also gives Antain information that will be important for him later. By being so open, Antain is able to further cultivate his hope and gather knowledge to eventually break through the Protectorate's censorship.*



*Antain's unthinking and unwavering belief in the Witch's existence is, at this point, a comfort—but the madwoman seems aware of the fact that there is no witch as Antain thinks of her, and the real antagonist is actually somewhere in the Tower. Though the birds are symbolic of the madwoman's hope, attacking Antain with them effectively robs Antain of some of his hope. It shows him that there is a far greater enemy in the Tower, even if he wrongly believes at this point that the enemy is the madwoman.*



## CHAPTER 14. IN WHICH THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES

Luna wakes up and feels different, though she can't identify why. She listens to birds sing, doesn't understand them, and then wonders why she would in the first place. Luna tells herself that she's silly and looks around. Fyrian is on her bed, which isn't allowed but is normal, and wonders why Fyrian isn't allowed on her bed. Xan is in her own bed and Glerk is asleep on the floor, which is strange—Glerk usually sleeps in the swamp. Luna's head hurts and everything feels weird. She changes into a dress, puts Fyrian in her pocket, and steps outside. Her steps don't cause flowers to grow, but she reasons that it's silly to think her steps *should* grow flowers. She sits down when her head starts to feel fuzzy.

Xan finds Luna sitting outside. This is odd, but Xan thinks that Luna will now be able to learn. She greets Luna, but Luna doesn't answer. Fyrian crawls out of Luna's pocket, greets Xan, and Luna suddenly perks up. She says that it feels like it's been days since she saw Xan. Fyrian tries to explain why, but Xan hushes him and pulls Luna into the workshop. Xan has rearranged it into sections with their own books and tools. Xan sits down and conjures her magic into a shining ball. She begins to explain how her magic works, but Luna can't see the ball. Her face is blank until suddenly, Luna snaps out of it and asks for something sweet. Confused, Xan gives her berries.

Luna asks why they're in the workshop. Worried, Xan says that she was giving Luna a lesson, but Luna drops off into a trance again. Xan puts her hand on Luna's cheek. She can feel the encased magic. She asks Luna if she knows what magic is. Again, Luna goes blank. When Luna comes to, she asks if she fell asleep. Xan gets up and grabs a few items. She thinks of the mechanism in Luna and wonders if she did the spell wrong. Xan assembles a scrying glass and as she tells Luna a story, she watches Luna through the glass. The story is about a witch who found a baby in the woods. Xan sees her words enter Luna's head. The word "baby" flies around in Luna's memory centers.

Xan says that when Luna was tiny, they looked at the stars and Xan fed Luna starlight. At this, Luna's eyes go blank. Xan continues and says that she fed Luna moonlight one night, thereby enmagicking her. Luna looks blank and absent for most of the morning after this. Xan and Glerk discuss this and Xan hopes it's temporary. However, Xan discovers that this is the consequence of the spell: Luna can't hear or see anything to do with magic. Xan doesn't know if Luna is internalizing it or if it disappears. Glerk asks how Xan will teach her when Luna turns 13, knowing that Xan will die. Desperately, Xan suggests that she did the spell wrong—Luna won't grow and her magic won't appear. Xan says that the alternative is too sad to think about.

*Luna's odd thought processes suggests that there are major consequences of Xan's spell—Luna is missing major pieces of information that would tell her something has changed. Forgetting in this moment is more confusing and painful than anything else, though considering Luna's prospects for the longer term, it suggests that she's going to go through her childhood with serious, confusing gaps and bad headaches—something that calls the ethics of Xan's spell into question.*



*As far as Xan is concerned, now that Luna's magic isn't volatile, she should be able to grasp the theory behind the magic and eventually be able to channel it. However, the fact that Luna enters into these odd trances whenever Xan mentions or shows Luna magic suggests that this isn't actually going to work. Instead, Luna will effectively be on her own to figure out magic when it erupts in eight years, since Xan has inadvertently made it so that Luna cannot learn anything at all.*



*Xan is likely telling Luna some version of how she came to rescue her as a baby—but now that Luna is unable to retain anything that has to do with magic, Luna is also inadvertently cut off from her own history. This means that Luna isn't able to learn any theory of magic, and she's also not able to know anything about herself, something that will become a major problem as Luna begins to mature.*



*For Xan, even though she knows she made a grave mistake somewhere along the line, it's more comfortable to tell herself that Luna simply won't be magical. In this way, Xan not only keeps Luna from learning anything about magic; she also keeps herself from puzzling over how to deal with Luna's erupting magic when Luna does turn 13 and needs to know the truth. This shows that Xan's desire to forget sad or difficult things doesn't just harm her—it harms everyone Xan comes into contact with, if only by accident.*



Glerk begins to push back on this, but Xan snaps that sorrow is dangerous. They discuss this several times but soon, Xan convinces herself that Luna was never magic and if she is, that the magic won't be a problem. She tells people in the Free Cities that Luna is allergic to magic and asks them to never mention it. Meanwhile, Luna learns science, math, poetry, and philosophy. Glerk insists that Luna has to know about death and magic, but Xan continues to insist that Luna is normal and too young to know about sorrow, since it's dangerous. Glerk asks why they think sorrow is dangerous, but Xan doesn't know.

*Interestingly, Glerk and Xan link knowing about magic to knowing about death—a connection that makes it clear that Xan is controlling what Luna knows about through more than just the spell. When Xan admits that she doesn't know why sorrow is dangerous and doesn't seem interested in figuring it out, it also shows that Xan is trying hard to ignore all of this herself—she believes that it's better to be happy and ignorant than face difficult realities and have to develop hope.*



## CHAPTER 15. IN WHICH ANTAIN TELLS A LIE

Antain's face scars terribly after his run-in with the **paper birds**. The madwoman tried to stop the bleeding, but the Sisters finally found both her and Antain lying in a puddle of blood. The Sisters claim that they didn't hear Antain yell, and people whisper that Antain is mad or attacked himself. Antain resigns from the Council and because the Council feels bad for him, they give him a good sum of money. With it, Antain becomes a carpenter and buys rare wood from traders. People lament his lost potential.

*The fact that Antain is able to use this tragedy to become what he always wanted to be suggests that there's always some sort of silver lining in tragedies, if a person is willing to look for the positive. Especially given that the Council seemed ready to murder Antain for his questions, this seems like the best thing that could've happened to Antain.*



Antain is soon a renowned woodworker. He is able to support his mother and brothers, but his mother disapproves of his profession. Antain doesn't notice and immerses himself in his woodworking. Years pass and Antain's mother still regularly brings up Antain's departure from the Council. One day, they walk through the Market and she browses through the fine items that few in the Protectorate can afford. Antain stares at the Tower and traces the map-like scars on his face. Antain's mother says that once he is done with woodworking, Gherland might take him back as a staff member. Antain says nothing and fingers the beautiful papers, thinking of **paper birds**.

*Now, Antain is haunted by the memories of the paper birds as well as by the memories of taking the madwoman's baby a decade ago. The fact that he thinks specifically of the birds, however, suggests that he's beginning to reorient his perception of the madwoman to a line of thinking that's more hopeful and positive, rather than dwelling on his complicity in ruining the woman's life.*



Antain's fame as a woodworker grows. Eventually, he has to refuse some orders, and traders pay him even more money for the work he completes. Within five years, he's well-known in faraway towns, some of which invite him to visit. He refuses, as nobody leaves the Protectorate, and it seems like too much to do anything but work and sleep due to the sadness that drapes over the Protectorate. Soon, Antain's mother insists that she's always said he'd be a success.

*It's significant that Antain feels that he can't do anything but work and sleep because of how sad the Protectorate is. This makes it clear that sorrow has the power to keep people from reaching their full potential. Presumably, Antain could leave the Protectorate and do even better for himself in the Free Cities, but his sadness prevents him from doing so.*



One morning, Antain's mother stands in his workshop as Antain works on a cradle with stars in the headboard. It's for a Star Child, whatever that means. His mother tells him to get an apprentice and then a wife, but Antain refuses both. Antain knows that once, he would've been able to snag any girl, but now, his scars mean he'll never marry. He assures her that Rook and her other sons will marry and give her grandchildren, and thinks of the madwoman hanging in the rafters. When Antain's mother persists, Antain excuses himself to run errands.

Antain wanders through the alleys of the Protectorate and keeps his hood up to hide his face. Sometimes, small children ask to touch his scars. Antain always lets them. Though he tells the children the scars don't hurt, this is a lie. They hurt like he lost something, and the children's fingers make Antain's heart constrict. As he wanders, he finds himself in the shadow of the Tower again. Sister Ignatia greets him and he notices a bit of a growl in her voice. This is the first time that they've spoken since Antain was injured. Antain looks at her and sees that though she's clearly been working in her garden for some time, she looks like she's just eaten a large, wonderful meal.

Antain lies and tells Sister Ignatia that he can't build her desk for another year or so. Sister Ignatia says that the Sisters are family and that this is silly. Antain looks up toward the madwoman, whom he sees every night in his dreams. Antain points out that Sister Ignatia has met his family. The madwoman appears at Sister Ignatia's window with a **paper bird** in her hand. Antain shivers and brushes off Sister Ignatia's concern. Sister Ignatia asks for one more favor and then barks at a girl. She explains to Antain that Ethyne has decided to leave the Sisters. Antain and Ethyne greet each other, and Ethyne looks right at Antain. Antain thinks that even his mother flinches when she looks at his scars.

Ethyne thanks Sister Ignatia graciously, but Sister Ignatia is snappy and rude. Sister Ignatia looks horribly hungry. She confirms that Antain will help, and stalks away when Antain says that he's always at her service. Ethyne mutters that Antain should rethink this and then shows him where her things are. Antain feels hope fluttering in his chest.

*For Antain, his mother's line of questioning about grandchildren makes it clear to him that he could have a child who will be sacrificed; his wife could end up just like the madwoman if this happens. For now, this means that Antain is too afraid to hope for a family, as he's too afraid of the loss and the awful consequences to consider that things turn out okay.*



*Being attacked in the Tower, on Sister Ignatia's watch, makes Antain believe that he shouldn't actually trust the Sisters to look out for him in the same way a family might—Sister Ignatia's sated look confirms this, as does her lack of an apology or any recognition that she's somewhat responsible for what happened to him. Through this, Antain learns that family should be open and accepting of responsibility—unlike Sister Ignatia.*



*The paper bird in this instance foreshadows Antain reuniting with Ethyne. It reminds him that there are still things to hope for in the world, even if he does have a scarred face and has lost the Sisters as chosen family. Refusing Sister Ignatia her desk shows that Antain now understands he has to put his best interests first, and not place himself in situations where he knows that someone like Sister Ignatia is going to hurt him.*



*Ethyne's warning against Sister Ignatia suggests that she's more critical and thoughtful than most other people in the Protectorate, something that suggests that she might know more about Sister Ignatia than everyone else.*



## CHAPTER 16. IN WHICH THERE IS EVER SO MUCH PAPER

The madwoman can't remember her name or anyone else's, but she thinks that a name is useless—a person can't rock it or tell it they love it over and over again. She knows that at one point she was smart, kind, and capable, but now her mind is disordered. She only remembers paper. She dreams of **paper birds** and entire worlds made out of paper. The Sisters have no idea where the madwoman's paper comes from, but she wakes up every morning covered in paper, quills, and ink. The madwoman draws the same map that reads, "she is here" over and over again, and dwells on when Antain asked who she was talking about. She thinks of the cuts and the scars on his face, which are a map that Antain could read if he knew how. She wishes he understood.

Every day, the madwoman releases **paper birds** out of her window. They all contain maps. At first, the birds don't go far. People pick them up in the street and pity the madwoman, but none of them read the map. The madwoman sits on the floor of her cell and pulls paper out of the gaps of the world. She draws the map and focuses her consciousness on Antain. She watches him grow up and ask his question over and over again. She sends a paper hawk out the window and it lands at Antain's feet. He steps on it and reads the map, looking from the Tower to the forest.

The madwoman feels aware of her own sorrow and thinks she's been in the Tower for forever. Suddenly, her sorrow transforms into hope. The **paper bird** and Antain both feel it, and the madwoman's hope seems to radiate outward. Sister Ignatia cries out in pain.

*For the madwoman, even more horrific than forgetting her name is the near constant sense of loss that she has about losing Luna. This again speaks to the novel's insistence that the bonds between birth parents and their children are unbreakable and are somehow magical in nature, especially since the map that the madwoman draws presumably leads to Luna and Xan in the swamp.*



*When none of the townsfolk read the map, it speaks to their lack of curiosity. Instead of being interested in what the madwoman might be trying to communicate, they instead dwell on their pity for her situation. Antain, however, is more hopeful, especially since he met Ethyne and she looked right at him. Because he's more hopeful, he's able to consider that the madwoman has something to say and is therefore able to begin to break free of the Protectorate's censorship.*



*When Sister Ignatia cries out in pain, it makes it clear that she somehow feeds on or utilizes others' sorrow, and that hope is dangerous for her. This means that hope will be the one thing capable of overthrowing the controlling government here.*



## CHAPTER 17. IN WHICH THERE IS A CRACK IN THE NUT

Luna thinks that she's ordinary as she grows into an 11-year-old. She hates that she only gets to go on some journeys to the Free Cities with Xan. While Xan is gone, Luna amuses herself in the workshop with books and inventions. Her favorite books are those about the moon, which she loves above all else. One day, she shows Glerk a mechanical cricket that she made. It hops and turns the pages of a book. Glerk is impressed to the point of being ready to burst, but he points out that the cricket isn't turning pages when Luna would need it to, and it can't read. Luna stamps her foot and Fyrian tries to make peace, but both Glerk and Luna shush him. Luna and Glerk argue more about the cleverness of her cricket.

*Because of the spell, Xan can't tell Luna anything about the Protectorate and the mysterious yearly trip that she takes alone. While the reader understands that Luna literally cannot know anything about this trip, it's worth keeping in mind that Luna sees things differently: she sees Xan purposefully keeping something from her, and with no indication that she'll ever decide to share. This makes Luna isolated within her family.*



Feeling prickly, Luna asks where Xan is. Glerk says that she'll be back in a week, but Luna whines that she wants her now. Glerk reminds Luna that according to the Poet, impatience is only for small creatures. Luna snaps that the Poet can boil his head, which makes Glerk feel wounded. Luna opens her pocket for Fyrian so they can walk up to the ridge and look for Xan. Glerk thinks that Luna seems off and as she walks away, and recites a poem to her about the virtues of being patient. Luna insists she's not listening, but Glerk knows that she is.

Fyrian falls asleep instantly. Luna thinks about him. When she was little, he was obviously older than her, and taught her about math. Now, Fyrian seems younger all the time. Whenever Luna asks about this, Glerk and Xan shrug and say that it's just how dragons are. Luna reaches the top of the ridge and is shocked that Glerk let her come this far. She looks out toward the Free Cities, where there is eventually an ocean. In the other direction it's just forest and the Bog, which Glerk insists gave birth to the world. Sometimes he says that this happened with a poem and sometimes he says that she'll understand someday, but it never makes sense. Luna decides that Glerk is horrible, along with everything else.

Luna has a headache. She sits and closes her eyes. She can see blue and silver, and can feel something clicking in her head. Inexplicably, she thinks that each click brings her closer to the close. Suddenly, Luna sees an image of a house with quilts, colorful jars, and a woman with black hair and a crescent moon birthmark on her forehead. She can hear a man talking about a mama. Fyrian asks Luna why she's crying. Luna insists she's not, but she does miss Xan. Luna feels as though she's seen the house and the woman from her vision before. She knows deep down that she once had another family, and tells Fyrian that she just loves her family. It's her first lie, though what she says is true.

## CHAPTER 18. IN WHICH A WITCH IS DISCOVERED

Xan can't deny that her magic is dwindling. She's traveling slowly and everything hurts. She's not afraid to die—she's seen thousands die, and they all look joyous as they go—but still, she knows that the months before she dies won't be dignified. She remembers how painful it was for Zosimos, but reminds herself that everything is for Luna. Xan stands at the top of the hill leading down to the Protectorate. She can sense the unhappiness down there, and chastises herself for never trying to help the people. She doesn't know why, but as she gets closer, she feels increasingly desperate to leave. She remembers crying in her room in the old castle and listening to a voice on the other side of the door saying "more." Xan hates remembering.

*Again, Luna's impatience makes total sense—she's at an age where she wants to know everything, and though Xan's spell has made this impossible, she isn't aware of this. This illustrates how even unintentional censorship can have major consequences, as it makes Luna feel alone and as though she can't trust Glerk or Xan to level with her.*



*Glerk likely let Luna come so far because he recognizes that she's growing up and needs space. Giving her space allows Luna to begin to put together how her world works and how she fits into it. Specifically, her thoughts about Fyrian suggest that she's aware on some level of the magic that controls her life (and Fyrian's too, for that matter). But because Luna can't remember anything about magic, she can't actually figure out how any of this works.*



*It's important to pay attention to the fact that Luna's discovery of her magic (the blue and silver she sees when she closes her eyes) and her history are linked. This indicates that as the story shifts more to follow Luna, Luna will break through censorship and forgetfulness all at the same time. When she lies to Fyrian about her tears, it shows that she's learning from Xan how to ignore sad things and difficult things, as explaining what she saw to Fyrian would likely be very difficult.*



*Remember that Xan will die as Luna's magic comes into its full power. Xan's poor health here suggests that Luna is getting closer and closer to having access to her magic, but Xan is doing exactly what she shouldn't be doing: insisting still that she doesn't need to remember anything. This means that Xan isn't considering how to handle Luna's magic, and is instead just ignoring that it's a problem at all. This contributes to Luna feeling more alone, and means that in practice, Luna actually is alone.*



The madwoman watches the **Witch** walk, even though the Witch is impossibly far away. She wonders if she knew how to see things like this before she went mad. Now, she knows that knowledge is like jewels, and that she can gather it if she tries. She knows where the Witch lives and where she takes the sacrificed children. Every morning, Sister Ignatia asks how much sorrow the madwoman experiences. While the madwoman's sorrow fed Sister Ignatia for years, the madwoman learned how to lock her sorrow away with hope and somehow knew the name "Sorrow Eater." The madwoman watches Xan and watches the Elders with a baby. She wants to tell the parents that they're looking the wrong direction. She folds a map into a **paper bird** and aims it at the baby.

As Gherland shifts the baby, he thinks that he finds the whole business annoying. He loves the pomp, but the babies are selfish and stinky. He knows it's silly, but he misses Antain. He feels like the Council lost something when Antain resigned, but he tries to tell himself otherwise. The baby spits up on Gherland and Gherland praises himself for being so honorable and selfless. Along the road, Antain makes eye contact with Gherland and then slips away and runs, hidden, ahead of the Elders to the clearing. Ethyne, who is now Antain's wife, stands at the road. They want a family, but Antain remembers the madwoman and leaving the baby. He feels guilty that he's let so many babies go, feeling that he couldn't do anything.

Now, Antain realizes that he also always believed that he'd be alone, but love proved him wrong. He wonders if they're wrong about the **Witch** and the sacrifice, and what would happen if they tried to stop it. He thinks it'd be better to have a baby in a world that's fair and kind and vows to try to reason with the Witch. In the clearing, he finds the madwoman's **paper bird** and holds it close.

Xan is late to fetch the baby. She uses her magic to sprint to the baby's side but as she arrives, Antain steps in front of her. Surprised and afraid, Xan calls on her magic and flings Antain. She transforms into a hawk, grabs the baby, and flies away. The madwoman watches all of this and feels nothing, but she remembers the smell of her baby's scalp, and wanting to fly. She watches Antain and regrets giving him the scars, though she reasons that they kept silly girls away. She watches him open the **paper bird**. It says, "don't forget." In her soul, the madwoman feels paper birds and real birds leap and soar.

*Now that the madwoman has discovered that the Witch of the stories isn't real—Xan protects the sacrificed babies—she understands that the stories' only purpose is to keep those in the Protectorate sad and controlled under Sister Ignatia's thumb. Now that the madwoman also knows the name "Sorrow Eater," which refers to Sister Ignatia, it confirms that Sister Ignatia truly does ingest sorrow somehow, and has constructed the Protectorate in such a way as to feed herself. The Day of Sacrifice, then, ensures that Sister Ignatia always has something to eat.*



*Though Gherland is still powerful, he clearly isn't happy. He still dwells on negative emotions and hates this whole affair. In this sense, it's easy to see that Gherland's annoyance is actually feeding Sister Ignatia as well and contributing to the Protectorate's collective sadness, despite the fact that Gherland is still profiting from this sadness. Antain's behavior, however, suggests that he's decided to take action and attempt to break the cycle of sorrow and silence.*



*These questions demonstrate that when a person can bring themselves to hope, they can begin to overcome others' attempts at controlling and censoring them. Because Antain now sees that he's been wrong in other instances, he can see that it's possible for him to be wrong in many places.*



*For Xan, coming upon Antain like this puts her in a position where she feels as though she has to act quickly. But in doing so, Xan deprives herself of important information—namely, that Antain could tell her about the Day of Sacrifice and why she finds a baby in the clearing every year. Her fear and desire to do the right thing, however, keep Xan from deviating from her path and asking difficult questions.*



## CHAPTER 19. IN WHICH THERE IS A JOURNEY TO THE TOWN OF AGONY

Luna feels as though she'll never be 12. She's quick to learn, but is frustrated by how much she doesn't yet know. She feels that there's something missing. Once Luna turns 12, she finds that this feeling doesn't go away and many other unpleasant changes occur. She's tall, peevish, and distracted. She also realizes that there are books in the workshop that she's never read. Luna can't remember their titles, and though she knows that she *should* be able to read the words, she can't. When she looks at them, she goes fuzzy for hours. Luna doesn't tell anyone since she doesn't want to worry them. It's embarrassing and strange, and Luna knows that it's wrong. Luna also starts to draw. She draws maps, a tower, and a woman with black hair.

Later that year, Luna and Xan go to the Free Cities to check in on the pregnant women. Luna feels prickly and worried, as Xan seems weak and pained—though she insists she's fine. Luna knows it's a lie. When they get to the first town, Luna runs ahead and tells a widow woman that Xan isn't well. By the time Xan arrives, half the town is there and ready to help her feel better. The townsfolk praise Luna, which isn't unusual. Luna, however, doesn't know why they admire her. One woman sighs that Luna sounds like magic. Xan shoots the woman a dirty look. Luna knows that she's heard that word before, but it flies out of her head.

Luna sits with Star Children, the youngest an infant and the oldest an elderly man. They discuss their earliest memories, trying to remember life before Xan brought them to their families. Luna thinks of things and wonders if they're memories or dreams. She says that she remembers an old man with swishy robes who didn't like her. Xan rolls her eyes and says that this is silly, but Luna goes on. She remembers a woman hanging from the ceiling, but Xan says that she's been there for Luna's whole life. Luna says that she remembers a boy who smelled like sawdust, but Xan explains this away. Few of Luna's memories are as strong as this one. She knows it means something and thinks that Xan never talks about memories.

The next day, Luna accompanies Xan as she checks on pregnant women. The first woman is very pregnant and doesn't even get up to greet them. As is customary, Luna kisses the woman's cheek and touches her belly. She feels the baby leap, and a lump rises in her throat. Luna busies herself making tea and thinks that she had a mother once. She makes a list of things she knows, including that sorrow is dangerous, memories are difficult, and that neither she nor Xan always tell the truth. The woman asks for Luna to put her hands on her belly since she lives "in the presence of magic," but Xan shoos Luna outside before Luna's thinking goes fuzzy. When she comes to, she is pouring cold tea.

*Again, the novel ties together Luna's emerging magic and the resurfacing of Luna's memories of her mother and the Protectorate. This indicates that Luna's journey is as much one of self-discovery as it is a journey to destroy the Protectorate's broader censorship. In this situation, Luna's normal teenage emotions (prickliness and the sense that there's something wrong with her) magnify the things that actually are amiss. These feelings, in turn, make Luna even less willing to ask for help.*



*Now that Luna is getting older, she's more aware of the fact that Xan doesn't always tell the truth. This begins to turn Xan into a real human being for Luna, rather than an idealized grandmother or parent figure. This does, however, also mean that Luna feels less able to trust someone who she should be able to rely upon unequivocally. In this way, the novel illustrates how silence and secrecy tend to breed even more of the same.*



*To Xan's credit, there's no real way to confirm yet if Luna is making things up, reciting an actual dream, or if these recollections are real. But by shutting Luna down and insisting that her memories aren't real, Luna again feels less able to trust Xan with her private thoughts or musings. Then, when Luna realizes that Xan never talks about memories, and that her own memories aren't as strong, it suggests that Luna will better able than Xan to grasp the importance of remembering.*



*Luna's list of things she knows are true suggests that she's more interested in telling and discovering the truth than she is in hiding things, like Xan does. However, because Luna can't retain anything to do with magic, she's unable to figure anything out. Therefore, she cannot feel safe or comfortable asking Xan about her origins. While the reader knows that Xan wouldn't be able to tell Luna anyway without Luna going into a spell, the fact that Luna doesn't know this makes it even more frustrating for her.*



At the next house, Luna arranges herbs and furniture. The woman praises Luna, and Xan says that Luna is so smart because she's Xan's. Luna feels a cold rush and remembers black hair and a woman screaming "she's mine." Luna can hear the woman screaming in her head, but Xan doesn't seem to notice. The rest of the journey is uneventful. Xan and Luna don't speak about Luna's memories, and the things they don't talk about begin to outweigh the things they do talk about.

*At this point in Luna's journey, these memories aren't comfortable, even if they feel true and real. This suggests that for now, at least, Luna is more willing than Xan to engage with her memories. However, that Luna is forced to do so privately means that she's not able to draw on familial support to make sense of what she remembers.*



## CHAPTER 20. IN WHICH LUNA TELLS A STORY

Luna tells Fyrian a story. It's about a girl with no memory, a dragon who never grows up, a grandmother who lies, and a swamp monster that loves everyone but doesn't always know what to say. Luna says again that it's about a girl who has no memory, but also has no memory of *losing* her memory. There was a man in a robe and a woman on the ceiling, screaming "she is mine." There was a Tower too. There was something scary in the woods, though it might be that the woods themselves are scary. Luna wonders if the world itself is poisoned with evil and lies. She tells Fyrian that she doesn't believe that part.

*By shaping what she knows into a story, Luna is able to test out some of her theories. Her response to Fyrian about not believing that the world is poisoned shows that in many ways, Xan has successfully insulated Luna: Luna is hopeful and thinks well of others, rather than believing that the world is just horrible for no reason. As she practices telling stories, Luna also learns that they're powerful—talking like this helps some of these things feel truer.*



## CHAPTER 21. IN WHICH FYRIAN MAKES A DISCOVERY

Fyrian sings Luna's name over and over as he dances and lands in her palm. Luna smiles. She and Xan have been home for two weeks, and Xan has been sick since they got home. Luna kisses Xan's cheek, and since Xan is already asleep, Luna lets Fyrian sleep on her bed. She warns him that if he snores, she'll kick him out. Fyrian promises not to snore and gives her his word as a Simply Enormous Dragon. He wishes his mother was around, but immediately takes this back and says that Glerk, Xan, and Luna are more than enough. He jumps into Luna's pocket and falls asleep. Luna falls asleep knowing that she loves her family, but she has questions.

*The way that Fyrian amends his wish for his mother shows that he's somewhat uncomfortable with the possibility that he can love his mother and still love Xan, Glerk, and Luna like family. This speaks to Fyrian's status as a true child (or dragonling), as he doesn't yet have the mental skills to think about the possibility that he can love everyone equally. However, it's also worth noting that nobody has pointed this out to him—so in this sense, Fyrian is in the dark and having to figure this out for himself.*



Fyrian begins to snore and in no time, his breath creates a blister on Luna's hip. She pulls him out and, half asleep, yells at him to get out. He disappears immediately and Luna falls back to sleep as her blister fades. Fyrian dreams of his mother trying to tell him something from the other side of the castle as the old man climbs onto her back. They dive into the volcano and Fyrian sobs, jerking himself awake. He has no idea where he is, and his body feels strange and puffy. He shouts for Xan and Glerk, and reasons that he sleep-flew here, though that's never happened before. Fyrian finds that his wings don't work. He flaps them and they blow leaves off of trees, which he tells himself always happens.

*To the reader, it's clear that Fyrian is actually a much larger dragon in this dream or sleep-flying session. When Fyrian tries to tell himself that he sleep-flew and that his wings are always destructive, it shows that he's learned from Xan how to make things feel true: all he needs to do is tell himself that it's true. However, doing this does mean that Fyrian isn't able to allow himself to consider that he's actually a large dragon right now, which keeps him from truly understanding this situation now or later.*



Fyrian's heart feels achy after dreaming about his mother. Fyrian's mother was a beautiful dragon, and Fyrian wonders how many years it's been since he's seen her, but thinking about time makes his head hurt. He reasons it hasn't been too long. Fyrian tries to take stock of his condition. He remembers his mother telling him to sing his fears away, and starts to sing that he's not afraid. His feet thump heavily, but Fyrian thinks that they've always been that way. Fyrian asks where he is, and a figure appears in shadow. Terrified, Fyrian approaches and realizes that it's a chimney with no house. Upon closer inspection, he finds stars carved into it and a mother hawk living inside it. The hawk is tiny, and Fyrian figures that he's no longer in the land of the giants.

Fyrian sees that he's in a ruined village. There are pictures of dragons, a volcano, and a girl with starlight for hair. He remembers Fyrian's mother introducing him to Xan, who would care for Fyrian someday. Then, Xan had freckles and braided hair. Fyrian thinks that this can't be right—he never knew Xan as a young girl. Fyrian starts to cry as he remembers Xan crying. He wonders how long it's been and remembers Xan warning him of how dangerous sorrow is. Fyrian peeks into the central tower and pulls out a pair of tiny boots with silver buckles. He remembers that the boots from the castle were giant and reasons that these are different. He remembers the magicians warning Xan and Fyrian to not touch them.

Something growls in the forest. Fyrian sings to himself and remembers that there are tigers in the woods. He shouts that he's fierce and begs for the creature to not hurt him. Suddenly, he remembers Xan telling him that they're family, and that if he ever wanders away and gets scared, he should say "Auntie Xan" three times quickly and a magic rope will bring him back. As the growling approaches, Fyrian shouts for Xan. Nothing happens. He shouts for Luna, and Luna lifts Fyrian out of her pocket, realizing that her burn is gone. Fyrian says that he was scared and in a strange place with a monster. Luna suggests that they both had bad dreams. They go back to sleep.

Luna wakes up with Fyrian curled up next to her. She tries to wake him, but he doesn't stir. Luna notices a pair of big black boots. They smell somewhat familiar and the heels say, "Do not wear us unless you mean it." As Luna picks up a boot to inspect it, pain shoots through her head. After a while, her headache disappears. She throws the boot in a wooden trunk where she keeps her treasures. She decides to tell Glerk and thinks of all the other things she wants to do. Luna knows that there was something she wanted to ask Glerk about, but she can't remember what it is.

*Fyrian's mother has been dead for about 500 years, and Fyrian is even older than that. It's easy to see that his head hurts in the same way that Luna's does when she tries to think about magic or what she doesn't know. This opens up the possibility that Xan has cast some sort of spell onto Fyrian, as well. Again, as Fyrian tells himself things that make him feel better but aren't actually true, he keeps himself from actually considering that things have changed, and makes it so that he thinks of this only as a dream, not an important experience that he should remember truthfully.*



*In this instance, Fyrian tries to actively alter a memory that's likely true and relatively unadulterated. Because he thinks that he's only ever known Xan as an old woman, he tries to ignore the fact that he did actually know her as a young woman. Especially when he then parrots Xan's warnings about the dangers of sorrow, it shows that Fyrian has internalized Xan's teachings and is learning to forget things and censor himself in order to make life more comfortable—even when doing so is dangerous.*



*When Fyrian is only successful at returning to the swamp by yelling for Luna, it makes it very clear that Xan's magic is already flowing into Luna and making her far more powerful than Xan. However, it's also worth noting that Fyrian had the wherewithal to think of calling for Luna in the first place. This speaks to the strength of their bond as family members, while the fact that Luna's name brought him home suggests that within the logic of the novel, family will always be there to help each other.*



*The pain in Luna's head indicates that these boots are somehow magical. When Luna is unable to remember the boots so she can ask Glerk about them, it means that neither she nor the reader is able to gather this important information—which, going forward, will mean that Luna is going to have a much harder time navigating her world, since she knows so little about it.*



## CHAPTER 22. IN WHICH THERE IS ANOTHER STORY

The parent tells the child about the **Witch's** Seven League Boots. Like all magic, they're not good or bad; they just allow the wearer to travel far in an instant. This is why the Witch can steal children and elude capture. Long ago, the Witch was a child. That changed when she found the boots. With the boots, she stole magic from other magicians and then from the moon. Then, she put a cloud of sorrow over everyone. This is why the world is gray, and why hope is only for children.

*This story implies that what Fyrian brought back from his dream was the Seven League Boots. By giving the reader access to this story and allowing them to put together how all of this works, the novel implies that readers should seek information from various different sources, look for bias and ulterior motives, and discover for themselves what's true.*



## CHAPTER 23. IN WHICH LUNA DRAWS A MAP

Luna leaves Xan a note, saying that she's going to collect berries and sketch. Xan will likely be asleep when Luna returns. Luna knows this isn't normal, but Xan insists it is. Luna knows that both she and Xan are lying to each other. She slips outside and begins to climb the hill. Luna notices that she stinks and thinks that her body is changing. She's also experienced other things she can't explain, like ending up in the top of a tree and hearing a squirrel respond to something she said. Luna hasn't told Glerk or Xan about this, as she forgets some of these events or is embarrassed by what she does remember. She hears a voice in her head saying that this has happened before.

*The voice in Luna's head suggests that her conscience is, on some level, aware of the fact that she's under intense censorship. However, none of this makes any sense to Luna because she can't remember her life before Xan placed the spell on her, since she can't remember any of the magical events that happened before then. Forgetting this means that Luna also can't ask for help or draw on her family as she navigates both puberty and her emerging magic.*



A crow looks Luna in the eye. Luna greets it and though the crow caws in reply, Luna knows it's greeting her. Suddenly, she remembers: yesterday, she gathered an egg from the chickens and in her hand, it became sharp and then bit her. It had become a crow. Now, the crow follows her, cawing. Luna knows it's saying her name and sees that if she looks at it sideways, it's blue and silver. She asks the crow what it is. It says that it's an excellent crow and agrees with Luna that Xan and Glerk won't be happy to see it. Luna knows that there's a word to explain the crow's existence, but she can't remember what it is.

*The silver and blue aura that Luna sees around the crow makes it even clearer to the reader that the crow is a being that Luna created. The crow functions as Luna's conscience in an external form. By creating the crow like this, the Luna is able to effectively accept help from another being—but given that the crow is of her own making, she's also able to accept help from herself.*



Luna trips on a rock and falls on her sack. It tells her to get off of it, and then Fyrian's head appears. Luna rolls her eyes and glares at him, but he says that he just wants to hang out with her. The crow caws, and Luna can feel him thinking her name. Luna climbs to the top of the volcano and asks Fyrian to be quiet. She snuggles him and looks at the forest in the opposite direction of the Free Cities. Luna reasons that the forest must end somewhere, and thinks that Xan has never explained why she can't go in that direction. She pulls out her drawing supplies, hushes Fyrian again, and tries to make her mind blank. Sometimes, she can feel her fingers crackle when she does this.

*Luna's growing curiosity about life in the opposite direction of the Free Cities is understandable for any young person who's becoming more aware of the world around them. But the novel also suggests that for Luna specifically, her curiosity is actually an unconscious interest in remembering her past. This suggests that as Luna grows and comes of age, she'll also start to figure out who she is and where she came from—and in doing that, she'll be able to best prepare for adulthood.*



In her mind, Luna sees the horizon and the world turning toward her. She draws until she hears Fyrian and the crow yelling at her. She wakes with a start and sees that it's noon. She assures Fyrian that she's not sick, but Fyrian says that something odd happened to her eyes—they were pale like moons. Luna stumbles forward and grabs boulders, which become light like feathers. Then, she jumps over a small ravine with a huge leap. Fyrian insists that none of these things are normal. The crow caws to stop Fyrian from talking, and Fyrian angrily flies home. Luna hurries down the mountain and pauses at a stream to freshen up. The volcano hiccups, which worries Luna.

Luna hears Glerk calling for her. She races down to him and sees that he's anxious and alone. Back at the house, Xan is still asleep and sleeps for another hour. Xan assures Luna that this is normal and Luna agrees. They won't look each other in the eye. Later, when Xan goes to the workshop, Luna pulls out her drawings. While she was dreaming, she drew a tower with a **paper bird** coming out of the window. She drew a baby surrounded by trees in the moonlight and then two maps. One leads to the Free Cities and the other leads in the opposite direction. They mark dangerous spots and good water. At the end of the second map, there are trees, the word "baby," a town, a Tower, and the words "she is here."

## CHAPTER 24. IN WHICH ANTAIN PRESENTS A SOLUTION

It takes Antain an hour to work up the courage to knock on Gherland's study door. He holds a handkerchief that Ethyne embroidered for him and remembers her telling him about the power of hope. He thinks about her pregnant belly as he knocks on the door. Gherland admits him, shouts, and rolls his eyes. Antain says that he'd like to address the Council to explain his departure. Antain swallows to cover up the lie, but Gherland agrees to let Antain speak. Antain feels hopeful as he stands in front of the Council. They congratulate him on his marriage to Ethyne and shower him with rich food.

The room grows cold as Antain admits that he lied about his reasons for speaking. Antain thinks of his coming baby, and says that his baby will be the last one born before the Day of Sacrifice. The Elders clear their throats, but Antain says he knows how to stop the **Witch's** tyranny. He says he saw the Witch. Gherland is beside himself, as he knows there's no witch. Antain continues his story. The Witch is old, in pain, and he knows where she is. He pulls out a map. Gherland and Antain stare at each other as Antain describes his route to the Witch's lair. He asks for the Council's blessing to save his baby from sacrifice by following the map and killing the Witch.

*As annoyed as Fyrian is with the crow, the crow is only trying to protect Luna—realizing now that she is magic might put Luna into a much longer trance, possibly until she turns 13 and the spell breaks. Despite this, Fyrian's willingness to speak the truth suggests that he has the capacity to not be as closed as Xan is when it comes to noticing the truth and trying to figure out how to deal with it. Noting that Luna isn't normal is an important first step to trying to figure out why, how, and what to do about it.*



*Though the narrator never entirely describes the madwoman's maps, it's likely that Luna's maps are very similar to the madwoman's. Again, this reinforces the bond between birth parents and their children, and suggests that both are drawn to each other, since Luna's map leads to her mother, and her mother's map leads to Luna. Because this is presented as a fact, the novel suggests that curiosity about one's origins is normal—and that remembering or learning about it is the only way to properly grow and prepare for adulthood.*



*For Antain, this handkerchief from Ethyne is a symbol of hope in that it reminds him of why he needs to speak to the Council, and in doing so, begin to change the way that things happen in the Protectorate. Gherland's willingness to let Antain speak again shows that Gherland isn't an entirely evil individual. He does care for Antain and wants Antain to be happy—just not too happy.*



*To the Council, Antain's explanation of his journey to kill the Witch certainly sounds like nonsense—but this is because the Elders are complacent and haven't considered the possibility that there might be more to life than their tenuous grasp on power in the Protectorate. They also recognize that if Antain kills the Witch, whoever she is, it means that the Council won't have power anymore—which means that it's in their best interests to put a stop to this.*



## CHAPTER 25. IN WHICH LUNA LEARNS A NEW WORD

Luna wakes in the night with a horrible headache right behind her forehead. Her temperature fluctuates and her hands seem to glow. The crow caws “Luna” and Luna insists she’s fine, but she knows it’s a lie. She steps outside and without thinking, she puts her hand in the air to gather starlight. She puts the starlight in her mouth and it calms her. Luna and the crow follow a trail to a stone standing in grass. It reads, “don’t forget.” It swings open and the crow expresses hesitation, but Luna walks down the stairs into a workshop. The crow continues to nervously caw as Luna looks through books full of scribbles that make no sense. Nobody’s there, but there’s no dust either. Even stranger is that out of the windows, Luna can see daylight and a smoking peak on the mountain instead of a crater.

Luna whispers that something is wrong. A piece of paper that says “don’t forget” flies into her hand and Luna shouts that nobody tells her anything. However, she knows this isn’t true: Glerk and Xan tell her things, but the things they say fly away. Luna’s headache intensifies as another piece of paper flies into her hand. The sentence has no first word, so it reads that *something* is the most fundamental element of the universe. Luna commands that the word show itself, and the pain in her head releases. She can read the letters. She sounds them out and shakily pronounces “magic.”

*Luna presumably walks into the old castle here, which suggests that her magic is erupting just enough for her to be able to see it and gather starlight without going into a trance. This suggests that Luna is getting to the point where she can begin to remember and begin to learn, thereby putting her in a position where she can figure out who she is, how she came to be a part of Xan and Glerk’s family, and how she can protect everyone that she loves going forward with her newfound power.*



*As far as Luna is concerned, she can’t forget anything because nobody tells her anything. However, when she finally starts to remember that Glerk and Xan tried to tell her things, Luna is able to come to a better understanding of her childhood. Now, she recognizes that she has all sorts of knowledge stored in her that, if she can access it, will be able to help her make sense of her world and her role in it.*



## CHAPTER 26. IN WHICH A MADWOMAN LEARNS A SKILL AND PUTS IT TO USE

When the madwoman was a girl, she drew pictures and listened to her mother tell her stories about the **Witch**. Her mother said that the Witch ate sorrow, souls, volcanoes, babies, and brave wizards. She had Seven League Boots and rode on a dragon. In the Tower, the madwoman still draws. She conjures paper and then folds it into **paper birds** or draws maps. The Sisters have no idea where the paper comes from, but the madwoman thinks that it’s easy—madness and magic are linked, and now, she can find shiny magical things in the bends of the world. One day, she discovered feathers in her cell. She looked at the feathers until they looked like galaxies and then, paper. After this, she could turn anything into paper.

*What the madwoman says about her mother suggests that the parent who tells stories to their child and to the reader might be the madwoman’s mother. However, the fact that the parent is unidentified also means that they can stand in for any parent in the Protectorate, as most of them recite the same stories and many have lost children. When the Sisters can’t figure out where the paper comes from, it suggests that the Sisters may have access to libraries, but they can’t yet expand their minds enough to consider magic or more than what Sister Ignatia allows.*



Nobody reads the madwoman's maps. Following the discovery that she can turn things into paper, the madwoman experiments with transforming other things, including herself. Transforming herself is exhausting, but she hopes to one day escape as a bird. The madwoman becomes a beetle and accompanies the servant boy to Sister Ignatia. She hides under Sister Ignatia's desk and stares at the visitor, Gherland. The madwoman realizes that Sister Ignatia never seems to age as she listens to them discuss Antain's intention to hunt the **Witch**. Antain has told others about it, and now people are beginning to hope. Sister Ignatia paces and says that the forest will likely kill him, which will prevent questions. However, it's possible that he'll come back.

The madwoman notices tears in Sister Ignatia's eyes, and that Sister Ignatia looks unwell. Sister Ignatia says that if Antain returns having found nothing, others may decide to look—and soon, the Protectorate will have ideas. Gherland weakly says that one of the Sisters could deal with him, but Sister Ignatia says that the **Witch** must kill Antain. She flicks her tongue out to taste Gherland's sorrow and her cheeks flush. Sister Ignatia says that *she* will kill Antain.

## CHAPTER 27. IN WHICH LUNA LEARNS MORE THAN SHE WISHED

Luna shivers. Papers swirl around her and notebooks crawl up the walls. The books and papers talk over each other until Luna asks them to stop and speak one at a time. They comply and tell Luna about magic, and that scholars developed the castle as a place of learning. She learns that one female scholar brought in a sick child from the woods and said that the child's parents were dead. The scholars decided to fill the child with magic to prove that it could be done and to study her. The girl didn't die; she became enmagicked.

One scholar, Zosimos, thought this was unethical. He heard the child crying at night and so he bound his destiny to the child's. He warned the others about the Sorrow Eater, who grew more powerful every day. The girl grew and didn't notice that Zosimos was dying. The papers whisper that they hope when the girl meets the Sorrow Eater, she'll know what to do. Luna asks who the girl is. The papers say that she's named Xan.

*Remember that Sister Ignatia is also known as the Sorrow Eater—she very literally feeds on people's sorrow, which means that Antain's hope is very dangerous for her. This offers more explanation for why Sister Ignatia behaves and organizes the Protectorate as she does; all of it is to make sure that there's enough sadness for her. Again, she also understands that it's essential that Antain not return from his quest if they want to maintain their control over the population. The Witch must prove herself just as horrible and evil as she is in the parent's stories.*



*Killing Antain herself is the only way for Sister Ignatia to keep everyone in the dark about the Witch, since it appears as though the Elders and Sister Ignatia are the only ones actually aware of the fact that the Witch doesn't exist. This is why Sister Ignatia can't send just any sister; it would spoil the story and deprive her of control over her army.*



*What happens to this child speaks again to the horrific things that can happen when someone forcibly separates children from their parents, especially since it seems questionable that this female scholar actually found this child as an orphan. This also makes it clear that the Star Children are extremely lucky to have Xan; their lives could have been much worse had someone not cared so much about settling them with loving families.*



*The revelation that Xan was the Sorrow Eater's (Sister Ignatia's) victim as a child makes Sister Ignatia seem even more sinister, as she clearly used Xan as a case study for what's possible when she separates families and abuses children.*



## CHAPTER 28. IN WHICH SEVERAL PEOPLE GO INTO THE WOODS

Xan sits by the fireplace. There's something odd in the air and underground, and she's in horrible pain. She thinks that her life is made of paper—**paper birds**, paper maps, paper thoughts. She remembers Zosimos writing everything he knew onto paper and thinks that the scholars recorded her life and wouldn't have cried if she died. Xan laments that Luna is the same as she once was, but she can't explain this to her. Nothing about this situation, from what happened to Xan to the Protectorates' sacrifice of babies, is fair. Because Luna isn't back yet, Xan decides to leave a note. She knows that she can't be late to this baby and can't be seen—transformations are more and more difficult now. She gathers her things and then turns herself into a swallow that's as light as paper.

Antain waits to leave until Ethyne gives birth. Their son is born around lunchtime and they name him Luken. The next day, with weeks until the Day of Sacrifice, Antain steps into the woods. The madwoman watches him go, unaware of why she needs to wait for him but aware that she should. She blows Antain a kiss for luck. As she watches him go, she whispers that he can't go alone because of the danger in the wood, and the danger that will follow him. She remembers the stories of the **Witch** from her childhood. In those stories, the Witch had the heart of a tiger and lived in the woods. The madwoman now knows that the Witch lives in the Tower. The madwoman turns the window bars and stones into paper and then **paper birds** carry her into the sky.

The Sisters discover the madwoman's escape an hour after dawn. They keep it a secret and Sister Ignatia tries and fails to cancel a meeting with Gherland that day. She offers him tea and cookies while she fumes silently. Gherland wearily says that Antain left. Sister Ignatia reasons that Antain's departure and the madwoman's escape can't be connected, even though the madwoman has been unfortunately happy recently. To make things worse, there's less sadness in the town now that Antain has started stirring up hope. Sister Ignatia reassures Gherland and reminds him that there's a witch in the woods.

Luna holds a note from Xan and angrily tears it up before reading all of it. The crow caws at her to not do anything stupid, but Luna informs the crow that she's going after Xan. The crow says it's a bad idea, but Luna insists that she has a map and needs to help Xan. Unnoticed by Luna, the note begins to reassemble itself. Luna packs a sack and just before she leaves, a small scrap of the note scuttles into her pocket. The crow agrees to come, though it suggests that she tell Glerk and Fyrian. Luna ignores it.

*In Xan's thoughts, paper represents both knowledge and callousness. She sees that the scholars had no emotional investment in her, possibly aside from Zosimos, and saw her only as a way to further their knowledge. Importantly, these papers that she's thinking about are likely the ones that are currently talking to Luna, which indicates that just because knowledge was recorded under questionable circumstances doesn't mean that the knowledge itself is bad. Luna is better able to understand herself and her grandmother after reading Zosimos's writing.*



*At this point, it becomes clear that the Witch in the stories is neither of the actual witches in the novel—instead, she's entirely fictional but contains elements from both Sister Ignatia and Xan's lives. This shows again how it's possible to use several different sources to create a single narrative of questionable truth. The untrue narrative has thus far been more powerful than either version of the truth, but as everyone begins to move into the woods, it's possible that more will learn the truth and begin to take down the inaccuracies of the narrative.*



*Reminding Gherland that there's a witch in the woods allows Sister Ignatia to reinforce the influence of the story of the Witch: because the fictional Witch creates such fear and sorrow, Sister Ignatia and Gherland are able to maintain their power. However, the fact that Sister Ignatia is struggling because of the madwoman's happiness and Antain's hope suggests that their reign of censorship may be coming to an end, especially since Antain's quest is really one for knowledge.*



*Luna's choice to go into the forest after Xan shows that even more pressing than her growing magical awareness is taking care of her family and those she loves. Especially since Luna is going in actively after Xan, her adoptive parent, the novel again makes the case that adoptive families can be just as close and loving as blood families.*



Glerk surveys the mess in the house as Fyrian sobs. Glerk insists that he's worried about Luna, not Xan, but this is a lie. He sits down and reads Xan's note to Luna. It reads that Xan is traveling quickly across the forest (which means that Xan transformed, a dangerous proposition given her health). Xan admits that she kept things from Luna and says that Luna is more than she knows. As Fyrian flutters about, Glerk examines the paper and sees that Luna's magic put it back together. He knows that her magic is starting early. The note continues that Xan rescued Luna as a baby and fed her moonlight, which means that Luna will live a long life while the people she loves die.

Xan tells Luna the reason for this—magic—but the word is missing from the note. Xan writes that it's the word that Luna can't remember, but she promises to explain everything if she can. Glerk sighs and folds the letter. In comparison to his life, Xan's is still impossibly short. Fyrian flies at Glerk with concern and Glerk decides that while Fyrian is sweet, he's unnaturally young and it's past time to grow up. He decides it's time to leave the swamp. Glerk assures Fyrian that they won't get lost and that an explanation will ease people's fears about Fyrian's size. Glerk and Fyrian follow Luna's footprints into the wood. Glerk realizes that Luna's magic is growing as they walk.

*Keep in mind that Luna didn't read all of the note before tearing it up—and for that matter, it's unclear how much of the note she'd be able to read, since she can still barely wrap her head around magic. This means that even now that Xan is trying to communicate openly with Luna, it's almost impossible for her to do so. Now, Xan has to face the unintended consequences of forcing Luna to forget—namely, that Luna is hurt and angry that Xan kept things from her and left with only a note.*



*As Glerk comes to terms with his own long life, he understands that getting involved with Xan and their chosen family means caring more about individual beings in the world than he might have otherwise. In this sense, while Glerk's family may technically be the world since he's the Beast and the Bog, for now he recognizes that he's a part of this small family and needs to do his part to help everyone grow up safely and properly.*



## CHAPTER 29. IN WHICH THERE IS A STORY WITH A VOLCANO IN IT

The parent tells their child that a witch (but not *the Witch*) made the volcano thousands of years ago. Nobody knows how old the Witch is, but she sometimes looks like a girl and sometimes looks like an old woman. The volcano might still have dragons in it, but nobody has seen them. The Witch might have eaten them. Each time the volcano erupts, it's bigger and more ferocious. The Witch caused the last eruption and it made the forest unsafe. She hated happiness, so she ordered her dragons into the volcano to make it erupt. The dragons were afraid of her and had no choice. The Witch laughed at them when they suggested she was going to destroy the world. The brave wizard saved everyone, but the volcano is now just furious. One day, everyone will die when it erupts.

*By this point, the novel has made it fairly clear that the reader shouldn't take any of the parent's stories at face value, given that Xan's lived experience has disproved most of them—and since the Witch herself isn't actually real. However, keep in mind that by crafting a Witch who's powerful enough to terrify dragons, the storyteller can create a villain whom people wouldn't dream of standing up to. Again, the tragic ending to the story and the society's overall pessimistic outlook teaches people that life in the Protectorate is pointless and tenuous to begin with and that they should just accept their circumstances, since everyone will inevitably die thanks to the Witch.*



## CHAPTER 30. IN WHICH THINGS ARE MORE DIFFICULT THAN ORIGINALLY PLANNED

Luna is terrified. She has her map, but the shadows scare her and she can feel the mountain churning. She trips and falls into a muddy ravine and the crow tells her he told her so. Inside of Luna, she feels something happening. She's always felt clicking gears, but now, it sounds like a bell and the word "magic" is real to her. Something itches in her pocket, but she ignores it. Luna knows that both she and the volcano should be sleeping, but she also knows that Xan needs help. She knows that everyone must die someday and remembers asking Glerk what happens when people die. He told her, simply, "The Bog." Luna knows that Xan is dying and pushes on. The crow warns her, but Luna falls as the rocks give way.

*Again, what drives Luna on this journey is her love and concern for Xan, her chosen family. However, now that she also knows that the word "magic" is real, she can begin to better understand her place in the world and can remember those instances in which Glerk and Xan tried to teach her about magic. Then, by remembering what Glerk says happens to people when they die, Luna is able to start reconciling her sadness that Xan will die with the knowledge that she's going to the Bog, somewhere good.*



## CHAPTER 31. IN WHICH A MADWOMAN FINDS A TREE HOUSE

The madwoman is used to being uncomfortable, but the **paper birds** cut her legs as they fly toward the swamp. She pictures her baby and remembers that long before she was born, her mother sacrificed a baby boy to the **Witch**. Her mother used to have visions of that boy growing up, just as the madwoman dreams of her own baby. The birds let the madwoman down in the swamp. Her heart leaps as she tries to remember the name she gave her baby, and then thinks of the Sisters telling her that her baby wasn't real. The madwoman knows this isn't true, and thinks that the Sisters themselves were just following orders—there's only one true liar in the Tower. She wonders how long she's been mad.

*As the madwoman thinks about her treatment in the Tower, she shows again how storytelling can be used to alter a person's reality and change what they think is true—though, fortunately for the madwoman, she still knows that her daughter exists and was taken from her. Sharing visions of her baby with her mother suggests that these visions are something that all mothers of sacrificed children experience, again making it clear that the bonds between birth parents and their children are unbreakable in the world of the novel.*



The swamp appears to be empty. The madwoman tells the emptiness that she doesn't remember her name, but she's looking for her child. Noticing that the door is ajar, the madwoman approaches. She notices that the goats need to be milked and the chickens are hungry. Inside, she looks around. There are drawings of a monster, a dragon, and an old lady on the wall. One drawing is of a woman with black hair in a Tower, and it reads, "she is here." The madwoman notices the signatures and realizes that her daughter's name is Luna. The madwoman also realizes that Luna and her companions are in the woods, where, possibly, there's a witch afoot.

*It's likely that on some level, the madwoman recognizes that Luna's drawings and maps, especially those that say, "she is here," reflect her own. This shows again how strong the bond is between birth parents and children. Importantly, however, the madwoman doesn't interpret any of Luna's drawings of her companions as threatening. This suggests that the madwoman will be open to understanding that Glerk, Fyrian, and Xan are also Luna's family.*



## CHAPTER 32. IN WHICH LUNA FINDS A PAPER BIRDS. SEVERAL OF THEM, ACTUALLY.

Luna wakes up well after sunrise. The crow caws its relief that she's alive as Luna checks her injuries and realizes that she's on a bloom of enormous mushrooms. Luna fetches her map and sees that there's a spot marked "mushrooms." The crow pleads with her to turn back, but Luna refuses. She walks on and feels herself healing. She doesn't look back to see that where she steps, flowers bloom.

*The blooming flowers are evidence of Luna's growing magic, while not looking back shows that Luna no longer considers the possibility that her steps should grow flowers as she did when she was a child. She has, in effect, learned to ignore things, just like Xan.*



Meanwhile, Xan, as a swallow, stumbles from tree to tree. She can't remember what she's supposed to be doing and if she's always been a swallow. She thinks that she's dying, but can't remember her life. Xan hears a voice asking Fyrian to be quiet and a discussion of the possibility that someone told Fyrian untrue things about dragon physiology. Fyrian is shocked; he believes that nobody has ever lied to him. Xan recognizes the voices and knows the name "Xan" when the monster says it. Fyrian tells Glerk about the house he saw and Glerk explains that it's probably a village, abandoned after the last eruption. Glerk says that Xan has been here without Luna. Xan suddenly knows who she is and races toward the clearing to save the baby.

The crow is beside himself with worry as Luna picks her way through a river of embers. He won't tell her what he sees and Luna tries to figure out how she made her map. The crow says that something is coming as Luna reaches an abandoned village and approaches the central building. The stones are engraved with dragons, people writing, and people with crescent moon birthmarks on their foreheads. There are other carvings of the mountain erupting and a dragon diving into it. Luna looks up as the crow flies into her arms, panicked, and thousands of **paper birds** descend. Luna understands that this is magic.

### CHAPTER 33. IN WHICH THE WITCH ENCOUNTERS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

Xan remembers living with her parents in a forest village when she was small. She remembers how they seemed to love her, and then they disappeared. A woman with a tiger's heart supposedly found Xan alone. In her swallow form, Xan rests in a tree and laments that she didn't turn herself into an albatross. She vows to complete her journey and then teach Luna about magic. She eats some ants, falls asleep, and wakes up when the moon rises. The moonlight sinks into her bones, easing her pain. She hears a terrified voice warning someone that it's armed. Xan desperately wants to help now that the moonlight has made her strong. She flies out and toward the man, who throws a rock at her. Xan falls.

Antain realizes that he hit a sparrow, not the **Witch**, and feels awful. He isn't sure he even has the guts to kill the Witch. The bird is still alive, but its wing is broken. Antain apologizes to the bird, picks it up, and remembers that Ethyne loves swallows. He promises the bird that he'll take it home to Ethyne and tucks the bird into a pouch. He can tell that the bird isn't happy, but it grudgingly accepts a moth.

*In this moment, the novel shows clearly that loving relationships between family, chosen and otherwise, help a person figure out who they are—Xan is able to remember that she's a witch and has a baby to save when she remembers who Glerk and Fyrian are. Glerk's discussion with Fyrian, meanwhile, suggests that Fyrian is finally getting the truth about his size and will possibly learn that Xan has been lying to him. Through this, Fyrian will be able to grow up and find his place in the family as an adult dragon.*



*Once again, connecting Luna's growing understanding of magic with the paper birds that came from her mother shows that discovering one's identity, one's past, and one's future are all connected to figuring out who a person's family is. As a symbol of hope, the paper birds also suggest that this will be a happier and more enlightening moment than the crow's behavior might otherwise suggest.*



*Now that Luna is beginning to remember who she is, Xan also has to reckon with what she remembers of her past. The fond memories that Xan has of her parents indicates that they likely didn't leave her of their own volition, whether the Sorrow Eater had a hand in their deaths or not. Connecting to the moon and to her magic allows Xan to remember that she's a kind and selfless person at heart, but because Xan is so ill, she doesn't take into account that fear makes people behave in strange and sometimes violent ways.*



*The irony here, of course, is that Antain did hit a witch—just not the one he really should have hit. However, caring for Xan in her bird form means that when Antain does eventually discover who Xan is, he'll be much more likely to reevaluate what he knows about the Witch, and whether Xan is the Witch in the stories or something else entirely.*



Sister Ignatia feels increasingly weaker. She ate all the sorrow she could from the Protectorate and congratulated herself on her handiwork before she left but now, two days into the forest, she's hungry. She scans the forest for life and discovers a nest of hatchling birds. She knows that she could crush the babies and eat the mother bird's sorrow, but it won't be very potent. She creates a scrying glass and looks around, but magic obscures her view—though she knows that all magicians perished 500 years ago, when they made the mistake of tasking Sister Ignatia with using her Seven League Boots to save everyone. She catches sight of Glerk, vows to kill him this time, and then crushes the baby birds. She sets out to find her Seven League Boots.

*The revelation that Sister Ignatia allowed everyone to die when the volcano erupted continues to paint her as a callous and unfeeling individual. It's worth noting that while Sister Ignatia feeds on sorrow, she doesn't seem to feel any herself—which could suggest either that she's closed herself off to it, or that she is somehow not in touch with the full range of human emotions. Targeting the mother bird's babies shows just how little Sister Ignatia thinks of others. Killing the babies allows her to control the mother bird's future and ensure that it will be a sad one—one that solely benefits Sister Ignatia.*



## CHAPTER 34. IN WHICH LUNA MEETS A WOMAN IN THE WOOD

The **paper birds** watch Luna, and Luna nervously greets them. The crow, beside himself, flies around. Luna understands that the birds know her and are somehow connected to the maps and the woman in Luna's dreams. Luna asks the birds what they want, but they say nothing. Luna sits down with a sketchbook, reasoning that if she can draw a correct map when she's dreaming, she can find Xan too. She focuses on Xan's face and angrily sees that she drew a bird in a man's hand, not Xan. The crow caws, "tiger," but a woman (Sister Ignatia) steps out of the trees. Luna doesn't know why she's so afraid.

*The crow's ability to correctly identify Sister Ignatia as the tiger that Fyrian and the madwoman have spoken of suggests again that deep inside Luna, she does know what's going on. Her apparent instinct that Sister Ignatia is bad news speaks to how good and kind Luna is, since Sister Ignatia is the exact opposite and is possibly so scary exactly because of Luna's goodness.*



Gherland is horrified when Ethyne seems unafraid of his imposing glare and greets the Sisters with him like friends. She offers him tea made with mint from her garden and brushes off his suggestion to grow something useful. Gherland notices that her house is clever and pretty, a combination he hates. The tea is unfortunately delicious. As Ethyne kisses her baby, she says that she and Antain grow a lot of things and give much of it away. Gherland announces that the Day of Sacrifice is coming, and Ethyne asks why he's here—Sister Ignatia usually terrorizes the parents of the sacrificial children. Ethyne is curious to know why Sister Ignatia is out of town, which infuriates Gherland—he hates when people ask questions. He thinks that Ethyne might go mad.

*For Gherland, Ethyne's happiness and "useless" garden means that she's hopeful and therefore difficult to intimidate—which means that he has less power over her. Again, this draws a clear connection between having happiness and hope, and being able to shut down censorship and power trips. Because Ethyne believes in Antain and in his journey, she's able to calm her fears of losing her baby. Further, when Gherland says he hates being asked questions, it shows too that he understands that a questioning society isn't one that's easy to control.*



Peevishly, Gherland says that Sister Ignatia is out on her own business. Ethyne approaches the soldiers, who blush as she approaches. She asks if the tiger prowls and silences Gherland when he tries to stop her questioning. The soldier hesitates and then says that the tiger is gone and everyone can sleep. Ethyne says that Sister Ignatia must be in the forest to kill Antain and turns on Gherland, who blinks in the horribly bright sunlight. He crumbles as Ethyne accuses him of sending Antain to die. Ethyne ignores him and asks the soldiers for help. The soldier named Mae takes Ethyne's arm, and the other follows behind. To nobody, Gherland says that there are rules.

*Gherland isn't used to being called out on his power trips, which makes this a wildly uncomfortable experience for him. Ethyne's ability to muster help from the Sisters shows that it is indeed possible to create family for oneself anywhere, as long as there's shared care and positive regard. Now, the Sisters can show Ethyne that they care by helping her work for a society that works for all of them and doesn't force people to live in fear and sorrow.*



As Sister Ignatia and Luna look at each other, the **paper birds** and the crow don't move. Sister Ignatia seems to look old and then young. She asks Luna if she made the paper birds and then her vision bores into Luna's head, hurting Luna. Sister Ignatia declares that it's not Luna's magic and asks if the pain is sorrowful, but Luna says it's just annoying. Again, Sister Ignatia asks if the birds were a gift, and Luna says that nothing is the result of her magic—she doesn't have any. Sister Ignatia laughs meanly, which makes Luna vow to hate her. She says that Luna is magical, but someone has tried to hide it from her. She recognizes the “spellwork.”

The **paper birds** roost next to Luna and seem suddenly sharper and more dangerous. Sister Ignatia steps back as the rocks under Luna's feet shudder. Sister Ignatia warns that the birds attack and says that their maker is wicked, broken, and mad. Luna has no idea why this makes her so angry, and growls that she and Sister Ignatia won't be friends. Sister Ignatia says that she's just here to collect something and tries to call her boots. Luna remembers a dream in which Fyrian brought boots back. Now, they're in her trunk. Angrily, Sister Ignatia brings the tower to the ground and Luna falls.

Sister Ignatia approaches Luna, magically brings Luna to her feet, and says that Luna has touched her boots. She demands that Luna tell her where they are, but Luna gasps for her to go away. Sister Ignatia laughs until the **paper birds** rise, make the air shake, and then attack Sister Ignatia. Luna runs.

*As far as Luna is concerned, Sister Ignatia is talking nonsense when she says that Luna has magic—because of Xan's censorship, Luna doesn't have the skills or the knowledge base to suspect that Sister Ignatia is telling the truth. However, Luna's instincts still prove correct and beneficial here as she decides to hate Sister Ignatia. With this, the novel continues to pit hope, which Luna clearly has, against the sorrow of Sister Ignatia.*



*In this situation, the paper birds function as a mother's love made physical—they're here to keep Sister Ignatia from getting too close to Luna and hurting her. As Luna begins to piece together her dream about the boots with the boots that Sister Ignatia is looking for, Luna starts to open her mind to the possibility that the things she thought were nonsense or untrue could actually be real.*



*Importantly, Luna has to essentially ask for help before the paper birds step in. This suggests that even though Luna's mother is looking out for her, Luna has to allow her to help; she can't just receive it without doing anything.*



## CHAPTER 35. IN WHICH GLERK SMELLS SOMETHING UNPLEASANT

Fyrian, perched on Glerk's head, whines that he's the itchiest in the world and scratches himself. Glerk rolls his eyes. Fyrian asks if dragons shed their skins, and Glerk considers. He doesn't know, but he quotes the Poet that each beast will find its ground. Fyrian asks what his ground is, and Glerk says that since dragons formed in stars, Fyrian's ground is fire—if he walks through fire, he'll know who he is. Fyrian declares that this is a horrible idea and asks Glerk what his ground is. It's the Bog. Glerk says that he's the Bog and the Bog is him. Fyrian insists that this is wrong—he's Glerk—but Glerk points out that people can be more than one thing. He sniffs for Xan's spells.

Fyrian warns Glerk that the rock ahead is thin and that there's fire underneath. Glerk confirms this and notes that the ground isn't supposed to be burning here. The volcano has been restless since the last eruption, but this feels different and Glerk is afraid for the first time in centuries. He picks up the pace and inhales deeply. He says that he recognizes the smell, and with a growl, says that it's not Xan's.

*From this conversation, it looks as though Glerk and Xan haven't fully prepared Fyrian for life as an adult dragon—Fyrian doesn't know where dragons came from, and he doesn't know what he's supposed to be as an adult. It's telling that Glerk doesn't censor himself as he explains this to Fyrian. Now that they've embarked upon this journey, Glerk knows that he must be truthful if he wants to maintain a relationship with Fyrian and make him feel safe and loved.*



*The simple fact that Glerk is afraid makes it clear that he's not above being at the mercy of the natural world just because he's the world's creator. By remembering this, Glerk is able to understand how he needs to act in the context of who they're dealing with.*



Sister Ignatia races through the forest, thinking of her boots and how much she loved them in the years before she took up residence in the Protectorate. They used to help her eat starlight and moonlight, but now she's hungry. She stops to look through her scrying glass and sees hands reaching into a box. Sister Ignatia shouts for the thief to not steal the boots. The thief pauses, but pulls the boots out and puts them on. Sister Ignatia scowls—the wearer can take the boots on and off as desired, but nobody else can remove them until the wearer is dead.

Sister Ignatia watches the thief walk and perform farm chores as though the boots are normal. She zooms in and sees that the boots are in the place where the old castle used to be. Sister Ignatia wonders if the old castle is still home, and laments that the magicians there had to die—they never considered that the person who was supposed to save them would leave them. Sister Ignatia feels clever but unfortunately, she has no one to impress.

*The Seven League Boots represent a different kind of power than that represented by stories. The wearer of the boots is in charge of their own path, and specifically their own speed. In effect, the boots allow a person to control themselves, while stories and censorship allow them to control others.*



*Sister Ignatia's recognition that she doesn't have anyone to appreciate what she's done suggests that on some level, even Sister Ignatia craves a sense of family or community. The fact that the boots are in a place that used to be home suggests that as Sister Ignatia returns to the castle, she'll also have to remember things she likely forgot.*



## CHAPTER 36. IN WHICH A MAP IS RATHER USELESS

Luna runs in panic. The crow caws that he was wrong about the **paper birds**. Finally, Luna stops and says that she doesn't want that woman anywhere near Xan. Suddenly, Luna's brain unlocks. She remembers being little and standing blankly. Xan told Fyrian to fetch a flower for a game and Fyrian flew away. Glerk appeared and scolded Xan for lying, but Xan insisted she must lie to protect. Glerk inspected Luna, and Xan explained that Luna caught sight of her scrying device when she made one to check for the Sorrow Eater. Glerk pulled Luna close and said they need to tell Fyrian, but Xan cried that Fyrian would reveal that Xan is a witch. After that, Luna will go into a trance every time she sees Xan, and Xan won't be able to teach her before she dies when Luna turns 13.

Luna's heart races. She's never heard the word "witch," but if she searches her memories, she finds it often. She says out loud that Xan is a witch, and she is too. The crow is unimpressed and says that this is obvious. Luna suddenly remembers all the times that Xan made scrying devices out of all sorts of objects. She grabs some objects and instinctively starts to wind a knot. She tells the knot to show her Xan, and peers through it. It shows her a frightened man. Luna asks again for Xan, and the device zooms in on a small swallow in the man's jerkin. Luna shouts for Xan and watches the swallow squawk desperately. The device gets even closer to the bird and the bird stares into Luna's eye. The device goes dark and Luna realizes that someone has blocked it.

*In this instance, Luna realizes why exactly Xan took her censorship and forgetting as far as she did: she knew that if Fyrian spilled that she was a witch, she wouldn't be able to teach Luna anything or care for her at all. As just a grandmother but not a witch, Xan had the opportunity to lay the groundwork for Luna's future education. Though Xan wasn't sure if Luna was internalizing these memories, the fact that she had these conversations with Glerk in front of Luna provides Luna helpful tools to remember and learn who she is.*



*In this instance, when Luna refusal to accept that her scrying device is telling the truth shows that Luna doesn't yet understand how magic works. Because she has no grasp of magical theory or what's possible using magic, Luna has no reason to suspect that this swallow is actually Xan. In this way, the novel again draws out the negative consequences of censorship and of forcing someone to forget.*



## CHAPTER 37. IN WHICH THE WITCH LEARNS SOMETHING SHOCKING

Xan tells herself that Luna is safe at home until it feels true, and grudgingly accepts bugs from Antain. She thinks of dying and leaving Luna, and knows that if she were a woman now instead of a swallow, she'd sob. Antain looks at Xan with concern and admits that he's never hurt anything before. Xan snuggles close to comfort him and Antain stops to build a fire and cook sausage. Xan can smell spices and love. Antain says that Ethyne made the sausage and Xan chirps to try to encourage him to keep speaking. She can sense a rattle in his chest, which she knows is the precursor to loss. He tells her that the Day of Sacrifice waits for no one, which confuses Xan. She pecks him.

Antain talks about how beautiful Ethyne is and Xan looks into his heart. She sees that it's not his scars that broke him; it's the memory of a woman in rafters clutching a baby with a crescent moon birthmark. Antain says that there's a witch in the woods who takes the Protectorate's youngest baby every year. Xan is horrified that she didn't see the connection before. Antain continues and says that his baby is slated for sacrifice, but it will surely kill Ethyne to lose their son. Xan wants to transform, comfort Antain, and tell him that the Star Children are happy—but that she made a mistake. Xan wonders how this started and then feels something predatory in her memory. Antain says that he's not wicked, but because he loves his family, he will kill the **Witch**.

*When Xan continues to tell herself that Luna is safe at home, rather than out in the forest and creating scrying devices of her own, it shows how much Xan relies on altering her own sense of reality to make it through the world. By encouraging Antain to speak more about Ethyne and his love for her, Xan encourages Antain to do the exact opposite. By focusing on his love, which is true and unassailable, he can accept other truths and reevaluate the things that he believes aren't true.*



*Xan's memory of something predatory likely refers to Sister Ignatia, which suggests that Sister Ignatia is truly the culprit and caused all of this sorrow. When she finally puts it together that the abandoned babies are sacrificed to the Witch and that Luna was one of them, Xan is forced to reckon with the consequences of not being curious and trying to figure out where the babies came from. In this sense, Xan is complicit in the sadness and the control that Sister Ignatia has over the Protectorate.*



## CHAPTER 38. IN WHICH THE FOG BEGINS TO LIFT

Ethyne and Mae walk toward the Tower. It's unusually sunny. Ethyne remembers her mother's stories about the **Witch** and that her mother lost a boy long ago. Because of Ethyne's constant questions, Ethyne's mother spoke about the Witch constantly. She died when the stories got too heavy, when Ethyne was 16. Then, the Sisters offered Ethyne a place in their novitiate. In the Tower, Ethyne noticed that nobody mentioned the Witch and that Sister Ignatia never aged. At night, something stalked the halls, and when a Sister's grandfather died, Sister Ignatia hungrily watched her cry. Ethyne realized that she, like everyone else in the Protectorate, carried the burden of the Witch. She learned that stories are power and began to suspect that the Witch wasn't in the forest—she was in the Tower.

*Throughout her life, Ethyne has seen firsthand the power that stories can give a person and the damage that they can cause to others. Discovering that the Sisters aren't concerned about the Witch helps Ethyne understand that even if the other Sisters aren't aware that the Witch doesn't exist, they're still complicit in helping make the Witch real for the rest of the Protectorate. By choosing to leave the Sisters, Ethyne then chooses to stand up for what she suspects is correct. In this way, Ethyne can show others her way of thinking and introduce them to the truth—something that, within the world of the novel, brings happiness and enlightenment.*



Wyn, Antain's youngest brother, greets Ethyne at the Tower door. Ethyne gives him a piece of paper as she hugs him and asks him if he'll help her. Wyn hugs Ethyne hard—she's the kindest person he knows. When Ethyne addresses Wyn by name and asks to see her Sisters, Wyn vows to help her. Ethyne and Mae walk in as the Sisters begin to chant. As Ethyne starts to tell a story, Wyn stands outside with a chain, a padlock, and a key. Ethyne says that the **Witch** isn't in the woods—she formed the Sisterhood and invented the story of the Witch to make everyone sad. Now that Ethyne is no longer sad, she can see clearly. Nine Sisters follow her out and Wyn locks the door behind those that stay. Then, Wyn and Ethyne unlock the other doors, including the library.

Protectorate mothers who lost babies begin to experience visions. They see their babies held by other mothers and know it's impossible, but the visions continue. They see their babies talking, walking, getting married, and having babies of their own. The mothers call the names of their children and know the dreams are real. They wonder if their babies are alive, and it makes them hopeful. The sky gets brighter and brighter.

Elder Raspin insists that everything is Gherland's fault. They watch a crowd protesting outside the Tower and Raspin says that Ethyne—Gherland's relative—is “rousing the rabble.” Gherland sputters that Ethyne will mourn as she should once they sacrifice her baby, but the other Elders grumble that there's too much sun and that the Sisters are shirking their duties. Raspin says it's Antain's fault and they should've dealt with him long ago. Gherland insists that all of this is temporary and that Antain will die. He says that it's as sure as the ground they stand on, which begins to rumble. The Elders open the window and see that the volcano is burning.

## CHAPTER 39. IN WHICH GLERK TELLS FYRIAN THE TRUTH

As night falls, Luna invites the sleepy crow to rest in her hood. Luna isn't tired and can't wait for the moon to rise. She remembers Xan teaching her about compasses and wonders if she's drawn to the moon like a compass needle points north. She also feels drawn to Xan and can hear the clicking inside her.

*Notice that Ethyne specifically draws a connection between throwing off her sorrow and understanding that there is no evil Witch in the woods. With this, Ethyne shows that people cannot properly learn when they're constantly sad and grieving. Instead, people need to be able to have the space to grieve when they do lose people, and in this way, they can develop the same sense of hope that Ethyne now has (which she has because she believes in Antain's mission to save their son). In particular, unlocking the library is a symbolic act of spreading truth throughout the Protectorate.*



*Notice that the mothers who lost children fixate on the possibility that their children are alive, rather than the fact that they're gone. This again makes the case that families can take many forms and that if someone else raises one's child, it doesn't mean the bond between birth parent and child is broken.*



*Though Elder Raspin reads as a thoroughly ridiculous character, he's also not wrong—Antain and Ethyne's hope is to blame for the changes gripping the Protectorate. This makes it clear that though Gherland may be the Grand Elder, his grasp on power is extremely tenuous. Because he has a kind side deep down, and spared Antain, he may now have to pay for that familial love by losing his power and his prestige.*



*When Luna specifically wonders if she's drawn to Xan like a compass, it again makes the case that familial love is an inherently strong and powerful force that draws parents and children together regardless of the distance between them.*



Fyrian shouts that he doesn't fit on Glerk's back anymore, and asks if Glerk is shrinking. Glerk says that Fyrian is growing and watches Fyrian's nose enlarge, then one eye, then his feet. Fyrian is confused and asks how it's possible to be bigger than Simply Enormous. Glerk tries to dance around the truth and says that Fyrian's heart has always been enormous. Gravely, Fyrian asks if he looks strange. Glerk decides to be honest and says that he doesn't know why Fyrian is the way he is. He's growing and will be big like Fyrian's mother. Dragonlings normally don't stay dragonlings for 500 years, but Fyrian did—maybe because of Xan's spells or his own grief. Glerk admits that he, Xan, and Luna aren't giants.

With tears in his eyes, Fyrian asks what this means. Glerk admits that he doesn't know, but soon they'll know more and they'll always be friends. Glerk lifts himself high on his tail and points down the hill. He can see Luna's magic emerging and says that Xan tried unsuccessfully to hold onto Luna's childhood. Fyrian asks if Luna is turning into a dragon, but Glerk says that Luna is becoming an adult and a witch at the same time. Fyrian puts his ear to the ground and tries to attract Glerk's attention as Glerk watches Xan transform. Fyrian roars that the mountain is on fire and that he remembers that he and his mother felt it first last time. They need to warn Xan.

Xan feels horrible and doubtful. She tells herself that she loved and protected the babies, but thinks that she should've been curious. Antain tells Xan that once the moon rises, he'll kill the **Witch** and they can go home. Xan thinks that she'd love to transform and tell Antain everything once the moon rises. She might even be able to magically send him home. Antain hears something and suggests that the Witch might be coming. Xan rolls her eyes and looks down the hill. She sees Luna and another figure she doesn't recognize. Antain hides with a knife so he can slit the Witch's throat.

*When Glerk chooses to finally tell Fyrian the truth, it doesn't illuminate much for the reader (or for Fyrian, for that matter), especially since Glerk can't identify why Fyrian never grew in the first place. However, giving Fyrian this information allows Fyrian to get a better sense of who he is and how he fits into his family, which in turn will help him decide what kind of an adult dragon he'd like to be. Glerk's honesty in this situation means that it's more likely that Fyrian will continue to rely on him for love and support in the future.*



*By reaffirming that he'll always be Fyrian's friend, Glerk makes it clear that growing up doesn't mean that Fyrian will be alone. It's important to note the shift here between Glerk being the expert and Fyrian being the expert. Now that Fyrian knows better who he is and that something odd happened to his childhood, he can remember that he's experienced similar things with the volcano before—and together, he and Glerk can decide what to do with that information.*



*Remember that according to the stories Antain has heard, the Witch can take the form of a young girl. As far as he's concerned, the Witch could very well be Luna. This shows that by choosing to tell stories in which the Witch can take any number of forms, the storytellers in the Protectorate can make it so that it's easy to shift the blame onto anyone female who has the misfortune of ending up in their path.*



## CHAPTER 40. IN WHICH THERE IS A DISAGREEMENT ABOUT BOOTS

Sister Ignatia sweetly tells the madwoman to take off her boots. The madwoman leans against the stone that reads “don't forget, I mean it” and misses her **paper birds**. She likes the boots, however, and feels as though they're perking her up. Both the madwoman and Sister Ignatia gather the bits of magic floating around and Sister Ignatia goes pale when a plume of smoke erupts from a crater. She says that they have to leave or they'll die in the explosion, and offers to take the madwoman back to the safety of the Tower if she hands over the boots. The madwoman calls Sister Ignatia “Tiger's Heart” and says that she's lying. The stone shows her images of Sister Ignatia betraying other magicians and leaving them to die in the smoke.

*Because the madwoman is able to use her magic to understand Sister Ignatia's past, she's better able to understand that Sister Ignatia isn't someone she should trust. Now that she knows Sister Ignatia's other name, she also has more power over her—especially since Sister Ignatia seems very disturbed that the madwoman is able to come up with this name. The early stages of the volcano's eruption add another layer of urgency to the events in the woods, and suggest that the end of censorship will come when the volcano finally erupts.*



Sister Ignatia asks how the madwoman knows that name, but the madwoman says that everyone knows it. It's a lie, however; Sister Ignatia doesn't have a heart. Sister Ignatia paces and says that she started every story in the Protectorate—and her fictional **Witch** never ate a tiger's heart. The madwoman says that right now the Sisters are talking about the tiger walking, and that her daughter isn't supposed to be alive either—and yet, she is. The boots will take her to her daughter. Sister Ignatia conjures knives and throws them at the madwoman. The madwoman races away in the boots as another plume erupts. Sister Ignatia races after her.

*By taking responsibility for all the stories in the Protectorate, Sister Ignatia shows that she's the one who has the most to gain from the Protectorate's censorship. However, Sister Ignatia has become complacent in her power and isn't used to having to defend herself like this, which shows that even having power like she's enjoyed has its limits. She's not prepared to stand up to foes who know the truth and are hopeful.*



## CHAPTER 41. IN WHICH SEVERAL PATHS CONVERGE

Luna races up the hill toward the ridge and the rising moon. She falls, and the pebbles under her hands turn into bugs. Luna remembers Xan teaching her about how caterpillars transform into butterflies in their chrysalises. Xan told her that it felt like magic and now, Luna remembers the word flying away. Luna can feel herself changing, just like the caterpillar. She runs higher and can sense a man at the top, as well as Xan. In her head, Luna hears Xan's voice telling her to go away. Out loud, she hears the man say that he's going to slit the **Witch's** throat. Luna yells for Xan to be careful and then hears a swallow cry.

*Now that Luna is aware that something important is changing, she's able to hear Xan trying to help her and keep her safe. That Xan is trying to do this speaks to the fact that Xan understands the power of the story of the Witch, even if the story is new to her. She understands that because Antain believes in the story, he's angry, afraid, and will try to hurt anyone who looks like they could be a witch.*



Glerk drags Fyrian forward as Fyrian complains that he feels sick. He falls heavily and then vomits in some shrubs. Glerk assures him that this is probably temporary and says that they can hope for the best. They rush to the top of the ridge.

*Again, Glerk's honesty with Fyrian paves the way for them to continue to have a warm and loving relationship even after Fyrian is done growing and transforming into an adult.*



The madwoman feels fantastic as she runs through the branches. Sister Ignatia pursues her. The madwoman pauses and looks wide. She sees Luna, Xan, Antain, Glerk, and Fyrian. The mountain rumbles and the madwoman says that she needs her birds and her daughter. She races toward Luna's blue, and the **paper birds** find her. On the ridge, the crow crawls out of Luna's hood and then flies ahead to see what Luna can't see. He sees Antain holding a struggling swallow and watches Antain look down the hill at Luna, the **Witch**. The crow screams for Luna to run.

*When the crow figures out what's going on, it allows Luna to also begin to dissect what's happening. With this, Luna begins to get a wider grasp of the truth and of how all these stories intersect, especially since the madwoman—Luna's mother—is also heading for the top of the ridge. This moment, then, will be the one in which these characters can figure out the truth and stand up against censorship.*



## CHAPTER 42. IN WHICH THE WORLD IS BLUE AND SILVER AND SILVER AND BLUE

Luna hears the crow warn her but can't stop running. She drinks the moonlight and it makes her feel more alive than ever. As she drinks, she realizes that the green glow ahead is Xan, who is somehow a bird. She sees Antain and sees that he's kind, but he has a knife. The madwoman races toward Luna's blue and silver magic until she catches sight of Antain. She sees Luna's blue glow approaching and watches Antain lift his knife. Luna says she's not a **Witch**. Antain, Luna, and the madwoman all leap, and the sky fills with birds.

*By drinking the moon and connecting with her magic, the magical things around Luna start to make more sense. As Luna's extended family network converges on this spot, it's important to note that this happens as Luna declares that she's not the Witch—one of the only truthful things that Luna knows at this point. With this nugget of truth, everyone can begin to figure out how they relate and where to go from here.*



## CHAPTER 43. IN WHICH A WITCH CASTS HER FIRST SPELL—ON PURPOSE THIS TIME

**Paper birds** swirl overhead and dive at Luna, Antain, and the madwoman. Luna rolls away as the birds swirl and land in a circle. Antain whimpers in fear, and Luna kicks his knife away. Luna promises that the birds won't hurt him and then looks at the madwoman. She notices that the woman has a crescent moon birthmark on her forehead, and Luna's heart calls "she is here." The woman whispers, "she is here." Luna remembers a woman with long black hair writhing, and asks the woman if they know each other. The madwoman says she has no name. She had one once, but now they call her "prisoner." Antain recognizes the madwoman and the madwoman apologizes for his scars, but asks if he's happier now. Antain explains that he was happy, but that his son will be sacrificed.

*Again, the way that Luna and the madwoman's hearts interact with each other makes it clear that within the world of the novel, the relationship between birth parents and their children is unbreakable, tangible, and magical. When Luna remembers her mother trying to protect her, it allows her to put these memories together with the woman in front of her. However, since the madwoman cannot remember her own name, Luna has to work harder to piece together where this woman fits into her life.*



Antain looks from Luna to the madwoman. He notices their matching birthmarks as the swallow starts to peck him. Luna says that she's not a witch and has never taken babies. The madwoman says that Luna is the baby as the swallow squawks. Luna shouts for Xan and meets the bird's eye. Suddenly, she remembers the madwoman, Gherland, and Xan feeding her starlight and moonlight. She remembers Glerk turning into a bunny and Xan trying to teach her about magic. Luna holds out her hands and focuses all her love, worry, and frustrations on Xan. Her toes buzz as Xan turns into her human form. There are tears in Xan's eyes as she collapses.

*When Antain recognizes the madwoman and Luna, it becomes clear that the Witch as he knows her isn't in front of him. When he recognizes that he made a mistake, he's able to take a step back and allow Luna to make the connection to her own past and her own magic. By using this magic to bring Xan back to her human form, Luna reinforces that familial love is extremely powerful and instinctive—she needs no instruction to perform this spell.*



## CHAPTER 44. IN WHICH THERE IS A CHANGE OF HEART

Luna pulls Xan's frail body into her lap. Xan asks if Luna's magic has started and says that she'll die soon. She asks if the word "magic" stays in Luna's head and explains that she locked it away to keep Luna safe. Luna says that she doesn't want to talk about it unless it will make Xan well. Xan instructs Luna to collect the moonlight and feed it to her, as Xan did for Luna when Luna was a baby. She says that she thought Luna's mother abandoned her. The madwoman whispers that they took Luna. Xan says she understands now. She was wrong to be incurious about the abandoned babies, but the Protectorate was so sad. She asks the madwoman for forgiveness and Luna asks if the children in the woods are the Star Children. Xan confirms this, and says that Luna was accidentally enmagicked.

Luna gathers moonlight and feeds it to Xan. They both feel better, and Xan says that her magic is flowing into Luna. It's time for Xan to die, especially since Luna has a mother who has always loved her. Antain weeps and apologizes to Xan. Luna warns him to be careful and notices a rock rise up to hit him, but she glares at it and realizes that she'll need to be careful. Antain asks if Xan is the **Witch** who demands a baby, but Luna insists she isn't. Antain says that *someone* demands a sacrifice. Luna remembers Antain and says that he angered the old men.

Xan pulls herself to her feet, and Luna sees that she looks older every second. She feeds her more moonlight. Xan says that they need to rescue the next baby, so Luna puts her arm around Xan and offers her other hand to the madwoman. Her heart says, "she is here." The woman takes Luna's hand as the crow sits on Luna's shoulder and the **paper birds** rise. They hear footsteps and Luna sees glowing, tiger-like eyes. Xan greets the Sorrow Eater.

*It's telling that now that Xan is willing to talk to Luna, Luna doesn't want to talk. This is because Luna is currently prioritizing her relationship with Xan over discovering new information, but this still illustrates how negative emotions make people incurious. The different ways in which Xan talks about how Luna ended up in the woods and how the madwoman says it happened (Luna was abandoned vs. Luna was taken) are also significant. This shows again how slightly different perspectives majorly influence how people perceive a story, and it helps Xan and the madwoman better understand each other.*



*Xan's insistence that Luna will be fine, in part because her mother is here, shows that Xan isn't precious or selfish about her relationship with Luna; she understands that Luna can develop a loving relationship with her birth mother without it threatening the relationship that Xan has with Luna. In this way, the novel shows that it's possible to love many different people without compromising at all.*



*The combination of Luna, Xan, the madwoman, and their collection of birds suggests that together as a united family, these women have hope and the truth on their side—now, they know that Sister Ignatia is the Sorrow Eater and that she's the one to blame for the horrors taking place in the Protectorate.*



## CHAPTER 45. IN WHICH A SIMPLY ENORMOUS DRAGON MAKES A SIMPLY ENORMOUS DECISION

Glerk and Fyrian watch the Sorrow Eater run up the hill. Glerk declares that they'll surprise her, which he hasn't done in a while. Glerk is so formidable that his enemies are usually too afraid to fight, which suits Glerk—he thinks fighting is uncivilized. He's serene by nature, like a bog. Suddenly, Glerk misses the Bog so much that he almost falls. He thinks that his love for Xan has kept him complacent and happy, but he should be in the world and is ashamed.

*When Glerk recognizes that being with Xan has meant sacrificing his role in the wider world, he discovers that loving someone as he loves Xan comes with a price—and now, it's time to resume his place in the world once Xan is dead. However, now Glerk will likely not forget her memory as he forgot Zosimos, as he now sees that these events will influence how he tackles things in the future.*



Fyrian can fly again, so he hovers above and says that Luna is on the ridge with the crow, whom Fyrian despises. Glerk points out that Fyrian can't despise anyone, but Fyrian continues that Xan is there and sick. He also sees a man, **paper birds** that seem to love Luna, and a woman who also seems to love Luna. There's also a lady like a tiger. Glerk says that they should charge. Fyrian is confused until Glerk says that the tiger lady—the Sorrow Eater—is the reason that Fyrian's mother dove into the volcano and why other mothers are childless. Fyrian screams.

Antain is confused to see Sister Ignatia. Xan tells Antain that Sister Ignatia is the **Witch**. The Sorrow Eater—whom, Luna realizes, is Sister Ignatia—taunts Xan and Zosimos's memory. Luna can see that the Sorrow Eater's magic is empty in the center. She steps forward, and the Sorrow Eater's magic begins to unspool toward Luna, but the Sorrow Eater doesn't notice. The madwoman tells Antain to hope so that the Sorrow Eater can't feed on his sorrow. The madwoman steps toward Luna as Antain asks Sister Ignatia how she could do this. The madwoman whispers that a part of the Sorrow Eater is still human—at night, she walks and mourns, but she never remembers why.

Luna focuses on the Sorrow Eater's sealed memories. Xan says that the babies didn't die—the Sorrow Eater never knew that Xan was taking the babies to the Free Cities where they were loved. She declares that the Sorrow Eater won't profit off of Antain and Ethyne's sorrow—and now, the Protectorate knows what freedom feels like. The Sorrow Eater grows pale and stumbles as Luna sees a pearl where her heart should be. Inside are memories, hope, and love. The Sorrow Eater realizes that someone is taking her magic, but the madwoman says that there's none to take. Both Xan and the madwoman say that the Sorrow Eater ate their sorrow.

The Sorrow Eater says that these are lies, but Luna can see that it's true. She sees that the Sorrow Eater's pearl contains memories, a loved person, loss, hope, and despair. Luna looks around at her companions and realizes that love, like the universe, is infinite—it can carry everything. She concentrates on the pearl and flicks it open. The Sorrow Eater cries as Fyrian zooms over the ridge and shouts at her.

*When Fyrian loses his composure upon learning that there's a single person he can blame for his mother's loss, it reminds the reader of how loving Fyrian is—he loves his mother, Xan, and Luna to the point that he's willing to act in a way that's entirely out of character in order to protect those still alive and avenge his dead mother.*



*Now that everyone is in the forest, where Sister Ignatia has no real sway like she does in the Protectorate, the madwoman becomes the source of all knowledge—she has, after all, spent the most time with Sister Ignatia and has learned through her magic how Sister Ignatia actually works. When she chooses to help both Antain and Luna understand how to protect themselves, it shows that their family is beginning to expand and include more people.*



*It's telling that the Sorrow Eater's heart is encased in much the same way that Luna's magic was. This suggests that within the world of the novel, it's possible to lock all manner of qualities and emotions up. However, judging by how locking up Luna's magic went over, the Sorrow Eater isn't going to be able to keep her heart locked up for long, especially since it's keeping the Sorrow Eater from experiencing a full range of emotions.*



*In this moment, Luna discovers that hearts—and by extension, families—can always find more to love and experience. Trying to keep love from growing, as the Sorrow Eater did, is ineffective. The Sorrow Eater's reaction to suddenly having to face her emotions shows that there are major consequences to being cut off from the full range of one's emotions.*



The Sorrow Eater's sorrow leaks out as Fyrian dives. They both lament their mothers as Fyrian picks up the Sorrow Eater and threatens to burn her. Glerk races up the mountain and tells Fyrian to put her down. Fyrian sobs that he misses his mother, and that the Sorrow Eater should pay. Glerk, with love, says that this answer is too easy. Fyrian sobs and Luna sees that the Sorrow Eater walled off her sorrow and eventually, it began to suck in more sorrow and made her hungry for it. This is why she began to cultivate it. Fyrian threatens to throw the Sorrow Eater into the volcano, but Xan calls to Fyrian. Fyrian drops the Sorrow Eater and puts his head in Xan's arms. Xan tells Fyrian that his heart is Simply Enormous. With her heart broken, the Sorrow Eater begins to age.

The ground shakes, and Fyrian says that soon the air will be bad and they should leave. The madwoman says that her boots can save them if Fyrian takes Glerk and the Sorrow Eater. They must go to the Protectorate to warn everyone. As Luna climbs on the madwoman's back, she reminds herself that this is her mother, not a madwoman.

## CHAPTER 46. IN WHICH SEVERAL FAMILIES ARE REUNITED

The madwoman skids to a stop on the wall. Antain runs into the Protectorate while Luna helps Xan down. Luna looks into her mother's eyes and watches them skitter through many emotions. Luna can see that she's either mad or broken, and hopes that she can be fixed. Luna says she needs to get high up so she can protect everyone. She thinks that the swamp might already be gone. The madwoman leads Luna and Xan up, and Luna considers her mother's magic. It's like a jumble of magical trinkets, but it buzzes with love. Fyrian lands on the wall and townsfolk scatter, screaming.

The volcano spews smoke and Luna asks if they can stop it. Xan says they can't—stopping it last time was a mistake. She suggests that together, they can protect. Luna sobs, but Xan reminds Luna of how they used to make bubbles around flowers. Luna takes Xan and the madwoman's hands and Xan shows her how to make bubbles. The volcano explodes.

Three weeks later, the Protectorate is still covered in ash. The sun barely shines through, even though Luna creates rains that clear the air. People seem hopeful anyway. After the volcano exploded, they put the Elders in jail. "Gherland" is now an insult, Wyn now runs the library, and the Road is open to anyone. Antain vows that he'll never leave his family again.

*When both Fyrian and the Sorrow Eaters grieve for their mothers, it again makes the case that familial love, and specifically the bond between birth mothers and their children, is stronger than nearly anything else. This is why Fyrian stayed small, and it's why the Sorrow Eater felt the need to construct a horrific life in order to keep herself from feeling her sorrow. Glerk and Xan's ability to talk Fyrian down from this ledge shows that they're still important parental figures in his life, and that they can help keep him from following in the Sorrow Eater's footsteps.*



*The recognition on Luna's part that this is her mother, not a madwoman, shows the power of language to influence how a person interprets something. Thinking of this woman as her mother forces Luna to look at her with love rather than fear and suspicion.*



*When Luna understands that her mother's magic isn't especially powerful but is full of love, it again makes the point that love is stronger than magic—the love infused into the madwoman's magic likely means that it's going to be helpful as Luna sets about saving the Protectorate. The choice to save the Protectorate in the first place shows that Luna now has the memories to understand the importance of doing what's kind and what's right.*



*Protecting rather than stopping the volcano is an important distinction. It means that Luna must respect that the volcano is going to erupt, but she still has the power to keep the people she loves safe. In this way, Luna learns again how to use language to shift her thinking in a positive way.*



*The fact that people are hopeful despite the lack of sunshine implies that the clouds were a symptom of hopelessness, not the cause. Jailing the Elders means that going forward, the people in the Protectorate will be able to create their own, true stories that make their lives better and remind them of how they should act.*



Xan and the Sorrow Eater stay in the hospital wing of the Tower. Xan knows that she'll die any day and isn't afraid. Meanwhile, Luna and the madwoman move into Luken's room in Ethyne and Antain's house. It's filled with paper, and the madwoman draws every day. Luna sets about discovering her mother's name, and finally tells her mother that her name is Adara. She promises to remind her mother of her name until she starts to remember, and the two hold hands.

Luna, Ethyne, and Adara visit Gherland in prison. Gherland spits that he should've drowned Luna, and says that he's dreamed for years about the children he sacrificed, though he knows they died. Luna says that none of the babies died and Gherland should learn to listen. Adara softly says that the new Council will pardon Gherland once he apologizes. Gherland scoffs at the idea. Ethyne says that she forgives him anyway, but it might help Gherland to heal if he does. Gherland asks to see Antain as the women leave. Gherland never apologizes and stays in jail until he dies. Eventually, people forget him entirely.

Fyrian grows bigger and bigger. On his back, Luna flies to the Free Cities. Everyone there grieves for Xan when they learn she's going to die. Luna tells them the story of a town under the control of a horrible **Witch** who feeds on sorrow. She explains about the Day of Sacrifice and the good Witch who saved the babies and brought them to the Free Cities. The Star Children's parents hold their children's hands tightly, but Luna says that she's in the same situation. She was taken from her mother and was raised by a loving grandmother. She can love them both: her joy and her love can expand.

Glerk stays by Xan's side and looks longingly at the Bog. Eventually, Xan tells him to take daily bog baths since he stinks. Glerk promises to take Xan to the Bog with him when she's ready. As Xan's health declines, Luna decides to sleep with her in the Tower. She assures Adara, whose eyes fill with tears, that her love is multiplied, not divided. The first group of Star Children arrives at the Protectorate. The Sisters throw the hospital windows open. The Sorrow Eater croaks for the Sisters to close them, and cries in pain. Xan asks them to leave it open. They hear cries of joy. Luna and Xan say that they love each other as Xan dies.

*Discovering Adara's name is a gift, as it begins to give Adara the information to start to rebuild her mind. With Luna back in the picture as well, Adara won't be dealing with the grief that she felt along with the loss of her name. In this way, with both her family and a symbol of the past, Adara can more comfortably look forward to the future.*



*Gherland's dreams about the sacrificed children suggests that like the mothers who lost their babies, he feels some sense of remorse and grief for them. This again shows that Gherland is more than just a cantankerous, powerful, and bad person—he does have emotions and sympathy for others, deep down inside. The choice to not apologize, however, means that Gherland suffers the ultimate punishment: he isn't immortalized in stories, and so is forgotten.*



*Now, Luna has the power to tell everyone in the world what the actual story of the Protectorate and the Star Children is. At this point, the Witch has an actual, verified identity (Sister Ignatia) and so starts to become more of a character and less of a symbol of what storytelling can do. By encouraging the Star Children to love both their birth and adoptive families, Luna can make the case that discovering their birth families doesn't mean that they have to love their adoptive families any less—their families can just get bigger.*



*Xan dies knowing that while she may have made a mistake in not being curious about where the children came from, she nevertheless created large familial networks that span the entire land of the novel. She can die having impressed upon Luna that she should always be curious and seek the truth, as remaining complacent means that she's more likely to make grave mistakes that cause others pain and sorrow.*



## CHAPTER 47. IN WHICH GLERK GOES ON A JOURNEY, AND LEAVES A POEM BEHIND

Later that night, Fyrian sobs and sleeps in the garden while Luna returns to Adara, Antain, and Ethyne. Glerk thinks that things are as they should be, and slips to Xan's side. He looks at her empty body, gathers starlight, and wraps it around Xan. Xan wakes up and asks where they are. She's a girl and an old woman all at once. With a smile, Glerk tells her the story of the Bog creating the Beast. Xan sighs, and Glerk says that everything is bound by infinite love. Xan stands and asks if Glerk is taking her to the Bog. Glerk says that it's all the same: The Beast is the Bog is the Poet is the World is the Poem, and they all love her. They join hands and walk toward the Bog.

The next day, Luna and Adara climb to the Tower. Adara puts an arm around Luna, but Luna takes her hand instead. When they open the door, crying Sisters greet them. Xan is gone. Luna realizes that to love is to lose. She sits down and finds a piece of paper. It has a poem on it about how the heart is built of starlight, time, and longing. The world spins as love reveals itself. Glerk says that he's gone, but he'll return. Luna dries her eyes and folds the poem into a swallow. She steps outside, and the **paper bird's** wings shiver. Luna's chest hurts, but she feels happy. She tells the swallow to see the world. It flies away.

## CHAPTER 48. IN WHICH A FINAL STORY IS TOLD

The parent says that of course there's a witch in the woods—she visited yesterday. This witch turned magic as a baby, when another ancient witch filled her with magic. Eventually, the old witch's magic flowed into the new witch, which is what happens when a witch claims someone to protect. This, the parent says, is how the **Witch** claimed the Protectorate. They belong to each other, and the Witch's magic blesses them, the Bog, and the volcano. This is why the Protectorate's children are happy and healthy. Long ago, the Witch received a poem from the Beast. It was possibly the poem that made the world. The Witch keeps it in a locket. One day, the Witch will fade and only the stories will remain. She might become the Beast or the Bog or a poem, but it's all the same.

*By returning to the Bog himself and taking Xan with him, Glerk makes the case that the future and the past are intrinsically connected. As the Bog and the Poet, Glerk has the ability to write the future of the world and involve Xan in the process, just as she allowed him to join in the process of raising Luna and Fyrian. Xan returning to a lifelike state to enter the Bog also casts a more hopeful light on death, as it shows that death doesn't necessarily have to be a sad thing, as Xan gets to be with Glerk forever.*



*Letting this paper bird go, just as Luna let Xan go and as Glerk let her go, allows Luna to make the final connection that to love someone is to lose them in some way or another. Now, she understands that she can both grieve and be happy, as there's no limit to what her heart can hold. The paper bird taking flight from Luna's hands suggests that going forward, Luna will spread hope just as Adara tried to do with her birds from the Tower.*



*In this story, the parent shows just how much things have changed in the Protectorate since the Witch (presumably Luna) claimed the Protectorate as her own. Now that Luna is in charge of things and spreads blessings, love, and hope, people are happy, healthy, and once again connected to the natural world. While it's unclear how exactly Luna "claimed" the Protectorate, the parent nevertheless casts it as a positive thing. With this, it shows that those in the Protectorate have reclaimed the power to tell their own stories, which helps them foster positive emotions and hope for the future.*





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