

# Princess Ben Study Guide

## Princess Ben by Catherine Gilbert Murdock

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# Plot Summary

Princess Ben has just turned fifteen as the story opens. She lives with her parents, Walter and Prudence, outside the castle although she is the true heir to the throne of Montagne. Ben is overweight and spoiled. She has overeaten during her birthday celebration and literally made herself sick. When her parents head to the mountain Ancienne on the annual pilgrimage to the site of an historic battle, Ben is forced to remain behind. Late that night, the bodies of her mother and uncle are returned to the castle and her father is missing. His body is later found in a cave atop the mountain. The people believe soldiers from Drachensbett, a neighboring country. The relationship between the two countries is strained already and becomes more so as the people of Drachensbett swear that a dragon is responsible for the deaths.

As Queen Sophia faces the reality that Walter is probably also dead, she begins to try to prepare Ben for her role as ruler. Ben is spoiled, immature, and hates the regimented role she's being forced to play. She rebels, refusing to take any of the instruction seriously. During a ball to introduce her to the kingdom and to decide on an appropriate suitor to become engaged to Ben, she behaves horribly and gains a reputation as a spoiled brat.

Sophia locks her away in a small room in an effort to keep her from snacking, hoping to bring her weight under control. However, Ben discovers a secret passage through a wall that leads to the wizard's tower where she discovers a magic book. She learns two important sets of spells - how to create fire, wind, water, and earth, and how to create a double of herself. She also begins to learn discipline as she works hard to master the spells.

When Ben is able to begin flying on a broom with the use of the wind spell, she is almost caught and has to flee through a window, leaving her double behind. The double is completely still and doesn't respond to anything. Ben flies toward the mountain and crashes there. She's soon captured by a group of Drachensbett soldiers, including Prince Florian. Having met at the ball, Florian believes Ben looks a great deal like the Princess but doesn't figure out her true identity until much later. Ben escapes the Drachensbett soldiers and returns to her body just as Florian enters the room, intent on kissing the princess in an effort to wake her from her sleep. Florian realizes that Ben has used sorcery and refuses to have anything else to do with her.

The soldiers of Drachensbett attack Montagne with plans to take over the kingdom. Ben dons a long red dress and flies over the Drachensbett soldiers, making many believe she's a dragon and scaring the attackers off.

Ben soon discovers that everyone is referring to her as a spoiled brat and sets out to learn to be a princess. Everyone is amazed at the transformation but Florian still refuses to have anything to do with Ben, the "witch." When there is a horrific scream coming from the foothills of Ancienne, Ben rushes to the rescue and finds a man dead there. Her pony throws her and runs away. When Florian sees the pony, he rushes to Ben's



aid and discovers she's fighting a real dragon. Florian is injured and Ben kills the dragon. Florian admits to his love for Ben just before he dies, and Ben brings him back with a kiss. She says that there is no such thing as happily ever after, and that their lives have been good but have included some problems along the way.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

As the story opens, Princess Benevolence or "Ben" to her family and friends, is stuck at home in bed while her parents and uncle make their annual pilgrimage to the tomb of Ben's grandfather who had died protecting the kingdom. Ben's fifteenth birthday party was held only a short time earlier and she'd eaten far too many sweets and had played in the twilight with her guests to that she'd made herself sick. She is petulant about being left at home but mother, Princess Prudence who is called Pence by her friends, insists. Ben's father, Prince Walter, promises to take her on a picnic as soon as she's well. She watches them leave and faces an afternoon of boredom. She naps and dreams of hedgehogs - the country's mascot that is engraved in many "obscure corners" of the castle and embroidered on many garments. When she wakes it's late and she is concerned for her parents.

Suddenly, she hears a disturbance from Market Town, the city located near the castle gates. A soldier is arriving with the bodies of Princess Prudence and King Ferdinand. There is no sign of Prince Walter nor of his trusted military escort. Everyone assumes the soldiers of Drachensbett - the neighboring country - are to blame for the deaths. That night, the people of the kingdom pay their respects to their fallen king while Ben remains at her mother's side. The bodies of the two are entombed the following afternoon. During the ceremony, some men of Drachensbett arrive.

In Chapter two, Ben describes the country of Montagne. There are streams that form the Great River and Market Town is protected by the massive walls of the Chateau de Montagne. Above the city is Ancienne, the mountain where Ben's mother was killed. Legend has it that giants roam the mountains and that those same giants built the castle which has walls that are three feet thick, further supporting the rumor of giants. The neighboring country is Drachensbett. When Ben's grandfather, King Henri, was on the throne, there had been a war between the two countries. Drachensbett attacked but the Montagne people - led by Henri - held their ground. Some thirty years later, the relationship between the two countries has been peaceful. Ben also remembers stories of dragons on the mountain and she clung to those though her mother assured her they were nothing but stories. The death of Ferdinand seems to be explained by slashes from a poison blade. None of his wounds appear life-threatening and his skin has a greenish tint. He apparently died trying to protect Pence. It seems to the people of Montagne that the Drachensbett soldiers knew of the annual pilgrimage to King Henri's tomb and used the event to kill the rulers, throwing the country into disarray which would make it easier to conquer Montagne.

Following the service, Ben is summoned by Queen Sophia. She is supposed to wear her best clothes but she has nothing suitable. Her best gown is stained with jam and her second best is too small. She refuses to wear anything of her mother's. Frau Lungonaso, a woman who sometimes works for the family and who has taken over



Ben's care during the traumatic situation, does the best she can and sends Ben to see the queen. On the way, Ben trips and falls in the mud. She's now completely at a loss and begins to cry. Frau Lungonaso scolds her, asking if she's a "sponge or a spine," which prompts Ben to get up, dry her eyes and prepare to march in to see the queen. Just then a group of men from Drachensbett ride through and Ben gets a look at a young man not much older than she. As she enters the castle, one of the guards tells Ben she's from "strong stock," and another refers to her as "princess," reminding Ben of the role she's now going to play in ruling the kingdom.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

An interesting aspect of Ben's relationship with her mother is that Ben has been indulged to the point that she's overweight and petulant when she doesn't get her way. She says her mother's efforts to indulge her indicate her mother's empathy but it may be that it was actually cruel to allow Ben to go so far in this direction considering that she is one day to hold the throne. Because her aunt and uncle - the king and queen - have no children, Ben is the next in line to rule. Her mother may have felt she had plenty of time to help prepare Ben for the throne but that was not the case. It seems that Ben might not have struggled so much if she had been groomed for her position as ruler from a young age. Another important aspect of Ben's life is that her mother and father don't live in the castle. This is Ben's mother's decision. She prefers that Ben not be caught up in the life at court with all its intrigue and politics. The result of that decision is that Ben has no idea how she's expected to act or react in formal situations. Finally, it's important to realize that Ben's mother doesn't particularly like Sophia. The two women - as sisters-in-law as well as being tied to the throne - should have found some means of communication for the sake of the kingdom and the family. Pence's dislike of Sophia has been picked up by Ben. Ben hates Sophia and sees it as cruel when Sophia begins taking over Ben's education as princess. However, Ben eventually comes to realize that her mother has misunderstood Sophia. Ben's ability to see past her mother's dislike of the queen is an example of the coming of age theme that is prevalent in this story.

Frau Lungonaso strikes a nerve with Ben when she asks if Ben is a "sponge or a spine." She's asking if Ben is simply going to sit around, wallowing in her misery, or if she's going to stand up for herself. Another situation similar to this will be what prompts Ben to stop sitting around feeling sorry for herself and face up to her ultimate responsibilities.



# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

In Chapter three, Ben talks about Queen Sophia. She says her father, Walter, and his brother, King Ferdinand, were raised by loving parents in the same home but chose very different women as wives. Ben's mother was a healer, devoted to her family and to helping others. They lived not in the castle but in the soldier's barracks, away from the "haughty aura" of the home ruled by Sophia. Sophia has never had a child though she sought the advice of many, including Ben's mother. A year earlier, it was announced during a formal event that Ben is the recognized heir to the throne considering the fact that Sophia had not produced an heir. Sophia wanted, at that time, to begin Ben's training as future queen but Ben's mother refused.

Back in the present, Ben arrives in the throne room. Sophia says the attack on the royal family can only be an act of war by the Drachensbett people. She says Ben will move immediately into the castle to be better protected and to be schooled to take the throne. Lord Fredrick, an elderly diplomat, asks permission to walk Ben to her suite. Ben, realizing the council means to seek a suitable husband for her, is angry and tells Lord Fredrick she doesn't want to marry nor does she want to move into the castle. He points out she has duties to perform as princess. He says she has supporters among the court but that she must listen to Sophia, who is the most qualified to teach her what's necessary of a queen. Just then a footman appears, saying Lord Fredrick is wanted by the queen, and he leaves Ben to go to her new quarters, the Peach Rooms.

In Chapter four, Ben manages to keep her emotions in check until she reaches her rooms. Then she begins to cry. Ben is forbidden to visit her mother's grave. Sophia says there is much to be done for the living and that Ben can do nothing for the dead. She is given the plans for her mother's tomb and Ben is crushed when she realizes "Princess Prudence" will be inscribed on the tomb. She says the name should be mother or "Pence," the nickname many called the princess. But she says her mother never stood on the ceremony and would have hated to be called Princess Prudence.

Ben tries to catch Lord Fredrick's attention each time they are in the room together, hoping for news of her father. He never answers her unspoken question and she comes to realize he knows Sophia would be angry at that line of conversation. One day when Ben is being fitted for yet another gown, she learns the Drachensbett soldiers seem to believe the story that a dragon lives on Ancienne and is responsible for the deaths of the royal family. In addition to being fitted for new clothes, Ben is forced to endure lessons in "comportment, dance, language, history, penmanship, needlework, horsemanship, and music." She says she can't even now decide which of the lessons she hated most.

Some of Ben's friends from Market Town try to see her but are told they'll only be allowed to write letters. Ben's replies are critiqued and she's forced to write formal



letters at Sophia's instruction. Her friends soon stop writing altogether. Each mealtime becomes a lesson in how to eat and how to make conversation. Ben hates the rigors of the lessons but she hates even more that she's never allowed to eat all she wants. Sophia insists that a lady only picks at her food and constantly chastises Ben for her actions and her appetite.

As the days pass, the queen has the king's throne shrouded and Ben takes it as a sign Sophia doesn't expect Walter to return at all. Ben is supposed to be on a strict diet but she regularly finds extra food hidden in a hamper beneath her bed. She says she never learns the identity of the person leaving the food but that the comfort it provides is immeasurable. The days pass and she is able to withstand the queen's bullying because of the food, though days sometimes pass between deliveries.

## Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Ben admits that her room is lovely and describes it in detail. An important aspect of the castle is that all the walls are several feet thick. This creates an "ex-room" or foyer at the entrance to each chamber. It's rumored that the castle was built by giants, hence the huge rocks used for the walls. At the entry to every room in the castle, a person opens a door that leads to the "ex-room." A second door has to be opened to gain admittance to the actual room. This foyer exists on all rooms and its true purpose becomes clear to Ben when she begins traveling through the castle walls.





# Chapters 5 through 8

## Chapters 5 through 8 Summary

In Chapter five, Ben says she is always hungry though she has three meals a day plus tea, and is never in danger of starvation. However, with the exception of the rare times she has access to the hampers of food, she is never fully satisfied. Sophia often insists Ben have only a small portion of the meal served to Sophia, and demands that Ben not finish before Sophia, who eats daintily and slowly. One day Ben is called away from dance class with Monsieur Grosbouche. Even though she's pleased to escape the dreaded dance class, she knows she's probably in trouble. Sophia produces the hamper which is often filled with food and left for Ben. Ben claims she has never seen it before but it's obvious Sophia doesn't believe her. Sophia leads the way to her reception room then takes Ben through a doorway and up a set of circular stairs to a tiny room no bigger than a cell. There's a pallet on the floor and Ben learns this is to be her room - the queen's newest effort to keep a tight rein on her.

Over the coming weeks, Sophia oversees Ben's every move. A few of the servants apparently hate to see Ben's anguish over food. A footman slips her some chocolate and one night she finds a raisin roll in her dinner napkin. One night, Ben's stomach growls at the table and Lady Beatrix - the woman who almost always dines with Sophia and Ben in an effort to teach Ben how proper women act at the table - refers to the sound as "vulgar." Ben is furious because she's unable to control the fact that her stomach growled but is chastised for it. Ben grabs Lady Beatrix's tart and shoves the entire thing in her mouth. Sophia slaps Ben's hand repeatedly with a strap but Ben refuses to call out. Her hand is brutally swollen by the time Sophia stops. They resume the meal and Ben realizes that Sophia is angry that the beating hasn't made Ben cry. Sophia admonishes Ben that she has to join in the conversation, saying a ruler's greatest duty is the ability to "speak well while saying nothing." Ben, still furious over the beating, says she'd always been taught the queen's greatest duty is to produce an heir to the throne, stabbing at the fact that Sophia is childless. Sophia beats Ben's other hand and then takes Ben to her room, locking her in just as Ben begins to cry.

Ben decides that even death would be better than this prison and moves toward the window. She leans against the wall and is amazed that her hand sinks into the wall. She discovers it's a magical doorway and Ben works up her courage and steps through.

In Chapter six, the first chapter of part two, Ben is faced with another wall in front of her and a set of stairs. She finds a small room and says everything is covered in dust except an open book. She reads the words "Elemental Spells" which resolves any lingering doubt that the room is magic. The book includes pictures of hands performing specific gestures and words in a language Ben doesn't understand. She goes through the motions and produces a small puff of a flame. She discovers the elemental spells are to produce earth, water, fire, and air. Ben can't imagine why she would use the spell for producing dirt or rocks, but thinks producing fire could be useful. She figures out how



to control the fire and lights the candles. With the book, she realizes she could produce air to fly. She remains in the room through the night and is horrified to realize it's daylight. She rushes back to her room but finds it empty. She quickly falls asleep.

In Chapter seven, a servant called Hildebert arrives. She's a large woman who tolerates no nonsense. She insists Ben go with her and Ben wrestles with the woman. When Hildebert falls into the wall where the portal is, she merely bumps her head on the wall, making it clear the portal is not open to everyone. Hildebert and Beatrix are amazed that Ben is so dirty. Ben knows she got that dirty from the night in the tower but can't imagine how she's going to explain it. However, she doesn't have to explain because no one questions how it happened. Sophia is confined to her room that day with a headache. That evening, Ben is relieved to make it back to her room so she can return to the tower.

When Ben goes back to the tower, she stumbles onto a heavy cloak that fits perfectly, though when it falls on her she is momentarily frightened. Back in the tower, she finds the book has opened to a new spell and she can't turn the page. She realizes the spell is to create a double of herself. The spell will leave one of her bodies lying in the bed so that anyone who looks in will see Ben, apparently fast asleep. Ben sees no need for the spell but just then she hears a maid shout that Ben is missing. Ben rushes back to her bed and tries to appear as if she's just woken when Sophia enters the room. Ben feels bad that the maid will be in trouble for raising the alarm, but realizes the need for the spell.

In Chapter eight, Ben sets out the master the doubling spell, called the Doppelschlaferin. Three weeks later, she finally accomplishes the event. Ben is often sleepy after giving up so many hours of her nighttime to the magical pursuits and is both angry and relieved when she sometimes finds the book sealed shut and refusing to open. She continues to create water and fire and becomes so adept at the elemental spells that she is able to create fire underwater, thereby warming the water to wash away the dust and cobwebs at the end of her magical sessions.

There remains in the kingdom the constant threat of war from Drachensbett and no word of Ben's father. Ben becomes complacent with her instructions and Sophia's demands. Ben continues to work on the spells, seeing no point in the spell to create earth but realizing the air spell is necessary for flight. Then one night she finds a broom in the wizard's tower. She wants to learn to fly but also finds a bucket, mop, and rags, and realizes the magic book will not open again until she cleans the room. She sets to work and the task takes weeks. When she cleans the mirror in the room, she discovers the mirror answers questions. Ben wants to ask if her father is alive but fears the answer.

## Chapters 5 through 8 Analysis

Ben hates Sophia and hates the current situation with Sophia having so much power over her. She knows that Sophia can make any demand and the servants and other



noble people in the castle will carry out her wishes. With that knowledge, Ben is terrified as she climbs the small staircase to the tiny room that becomes her bedroom after Sophia discovers Ben has been given hampers of food. It would not be impossible to believe the queen would have Ben executed. Ben will obviously be the next ruler of the kingdom but, if she were dead, the throne might well fall to Sophia. With those thoughts rushing through her mind, Ben is relieved to discover Sophia expects her to sleep in the little room. It's uncomfortable and puts an end to the secret food hamper, but it's better than being executed.

While Ben is in the tower for the first time, she recalls the fairy tale of a princess with very long hair. In that fairy tale, the princess lowers her hair for her prince to climb up. Ben notes that her hair is barely long enough to drape over the window sill and that she would need a very tough scalp to withstand the weight of someone climbing her hair. She also notes that she doesn't want a prince who'll climb up the tower to her but wants to find a way to escape the tower.

Ben is frank about her appearance. She says she isn't pretty and often refers to her weight. The fact that she's apparently quite a bit overweight is one of the main battles between Ben and Sophia. Sophia seems to see the weight problem as a sign that Ben has a lack of control and Ben sees Sophia's efforts to make her slim down as a hateful effort at control. Ben's mother has allowed her to overindulge, apparently quite often. Ben turns to food for comfort and that seems to be the main reason she's overweight.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

In Chapter nine, Ben is horribly lonely for her parents. Ben's eating becomes an even greater bone of contention with Sophia and Beatrix. Ben pledges that she and her father will feast daily as soon as he returns home. However, Sophia can't be too harsh because Lord Fredrick is with them at the table nightly and Sophia apparently doesn't want to treat Ben badly in front of him. One night Ben steps through the wall and into the small room that includes the staircase leading up to the wizard's tower only to discover there's a staircase down. She knows she's supposed to go down and finds herself panicked when she enters a small room with a door on each side and the Montagne hedgehog emblazoned on the adjoining wall until she realizes she's in one of the ex-rooms. She wanders about the castle that night and discovers the hedgehog - the mascot of the kingdom - is on each wall that contains a magical passage. She makes her way to the larders and is delighted to find shelves of food. When she's certain she's alone, she begins to eat. She doesn't take anything that might be missed but soon discovers she's got food on her cloak and has left footprints in the pantry.

On the way back to her room, she sees Hildebert shuffling down a hallway. Unable to resist, Ben sticks her head through a portal to scare Hildebert. However, Hildebert doesn't even pause and says she'd always known the castle was haunted.

The next night, Ben sets out to explore, planning to find something to eat as well. She finds Sophia and Lord Fredrick talking about the situation in the kingdom and learns they are planning to host an enormous ball, inviting all the eligible young men of rank in the area in an effort to find a suitable husband for Ben. Fredrick says Ben is very young but Sophia says the kingdom faces a crisis in the form of the threat from Drachensbett and that girls younger than Sophia have been pledged in marriage in an effort to avert similar crises.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Ben is afraid the first time she travels through the walls of the castle and doesn't immediately realize where she is or what's happening. She soon discovers that the passageway through which she's traveling is actually the inside of the walls of the castle. She's talked about the fact that the walls of the castle are several feet thick and that the legend says giants built the castle. However, now she knows the purpose of the wide walls is to provide a passage for the magical people. She also realizes the tradition of keeping both doors of the small ex-rooms closed is to ensure the ability of the magical people to move about unseen.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

In Chapter ten, everyone is focused on the preparations for the upcoming ball though Ben thinks the preparations are in excess of what's necessary. Ben is even pressed into service and forced to help clean. One evening at dinner, Lord Fredrick says he'd seen Ben earlier in the day. Every time Ben is alone, she sticks her arm into one of the secret entryways and she immediately fears Lord Fredrick saw her. He goes on to say one of the castle's legends is that the ex-rooms were actually "hex rooms" used by witches in centuries past. Lord Fredrick says it's a way of explaining the recent rumors that the castle is haunted. Ben is furious that she hasn't heard any of these rumors. The next morning she talks to a serving maid who says there are lights in the wizard's tower though there is no stairway to reach the tower, and that the cooks have reported food missing from the pantry. The maid asks Ben if she's seen anything suspicious since the tower is directly above her room.

Ben says there are many things going on in her life at the moment. The ball that will theoretically end in an announcement of her engagement is very near and there are still rumors of impending war. Added to that, she's always sleepy and constantly on guard in case someone discover her secret. Still, she is intent on learning to fly and begins practicing in her room. One day when she's practicing dancing, Lord Fredrick asks for a dance. While they are dancing, he turns the topic to the upcoming ball. She says it seems a lot of fuss and he agrees but then points out to her that there's a lot riding on the outcome. Ben says it's only really important to Sophia but Lord Fredrick points out that Sophia is trying to do what's best for the kingdom and for Ben. Ben is obviously not convinced of this and Lord Fredrick says that Sophia has had only limited experience with children and doesn't know how to be a parent, though she's been thrust into that role with Ben. Ben still seems skeptical and Lord Fredrick says that countries show their strengths in many ways, and that sometimes a ball is as important as a show of strength on a battlefield.

The day of the ball arrives and Ben is basically put on display. One of the young men who hopes for her hand in marriage is a baron named Edwig and Ben hates him almost immediately. He tells her she's beautiful and then complains of his accommodations, saying he's been bruised by a pea under his mattress. Ben, rather than agreeing that he must be terribly delicate to have suffered so, tells him he's incredibly rude. Sophia chastises her and moves Ben on to meet King Renaldo of Drachensbett and his son, Florian. It's obvious Florian is among those being considered a husband for Ben. Ben hates their presence, still blaming them for the deaths of her parents and uncle, but King Renaldo seems genuinely sorry.

Ben finds herself alone later in the evening and slips through the wall and up to her room. She hates the situation and decides she can leave her double sleeping in her bed and simply fly away. She convinces herself a sleeping princess who doesn't do anything



is as good for the kingdom as she, and that she'll at least have the opportunity to live her life as she sees fit. She is just about to open the window with the intention of flying out when she hears footsteps pounding up the stairs to her room. She has donned the heavy cloak and is unable to figure out what to do, so stands there while Sophia barges into the room. Sophia rushes at the double first but then sees Ben at the window. However, Sophia doesn't recognize Ben at the window and thinks it's a witch. As the guards rush to grab her, Ben plunges through the window.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

One day Ben is practicing her dancing with her tutor when Lord Fredrick arrives. Ben hates to dance and hates the lessons. She's totally surprised when Lord Fredrick asks her to dance with him. She has spent so much of her time hating the dance lessons that she's never given a thought to the fact that she might enjoy them. But with Lord Fredrick leading, she finds dancing isn't the horrific chore she'd thought it to be. The problem then is that she's given no real effort to learning and she can't dance without stepping on Lord Fredrick's toes. She is horrified at the mistake and apologizes, but he says a dancer should be "so enthralled with his partner that he pays no attention to such trivialities." Ben blushes at the idea. Ben seems to take Lord Fredrick's comments about the importance of the ball to heart but obviously doesn't really believe it. She seems to believe that it's important for her to do her best while he's talking to her but her actions during the ball say otherwise.



# Chapters 11 through 13

## Chapters 11 through 13 Summary

In Chapter eleven, Ben is soon plunging toward the ground and fears she's going to crash. The castle is atop a hill and she manages to focus and begin to fly before she hits the ground. She is soon being fired on by the castle guards. She flies toward the mountain, Ancienne, and crashes into a boulder. When she wakes, she is very cold and the broom is broken. It's very cold and she knows she's going to be in trouble if she doesn't find shelter soon. She finds a cave and makes her way inside where she finds the body of her father. She discovers there are some words on the wall of the cave. One sentence reads, "Farewell, Sweet Ben," which makes her cry. There is another sentence that she believes reads, "Pursued Drachensbett." With the discovery of his body, Ben realizes the significance of the letters she'd seen scratched into the rock at the entrance of the cave. The letters were "HRHWKM" and they stand for "His Royal Highness, Walter, King of Montagne." Ben knows that because his final words were only to her and that he referred to himself as king, that he knew his wife and brother were dead.

Ben believes she now knows for certain that Drachensbett soldiers were responsible for the deaths of her parents and uncle, and she pledges to return to Montagne to avenge the murders. However, she is soon faced with the reality of the harsh conditions and it becomes evident that she's likely to die from the cold weather on the mountain. However, she encounters a group of Drachensbett soldiers who shoot her in the arm with an arrow. They mistake her for a boy and when she says her name is Ben, they believe they've found a shepherd boy who has been missing for some time.

In Chapter twelve, Ben is taken back to the camp of the Drachensbett soldiers where the camp's cook - who is also the camp doctor - tends her wounds. They are all very rough with Ben and she realizes she will be safer if she makes them continue to think she's a boy. She does an array of chores around the camp and they begin to call her "Piglet." She is soon assigned the duty of lighting fires because she can coax a flame using her powers even when the wood is damp and the kindling sparse. The days pass and she has fallen into a routine of sorts when Florian arrives in the camp. He immediately asks if they've met before and swears that the camp's captive looks very much like the princess of Montagne.

Florian relates the story of how Sophia chased a witch from the room of the poor princess of Montagne and that the princess has been fast asleep ever since. Florian plans to travel to the castle where he believes he can revive the sleeping princess with a single kiss, thereby earning his rank as ruler of Montagne. When Ben overhears the conversation, she knows she must return to her double before Florian can reach the castle.





In Chapter thirteen, seven weeks have passed since the night of the ball. In the middle of the night, she's wakened by the cook who says one of the soldiers, Johannes, is very ill and Florian wants the cook to care for the man. When the cook arrives in the room, he pronounces a treatment but Ben doesn't agree and speaks up. Florian agrees to take Ben's advice and Ben is assigned the task of caring for Johannes who is also Florian's friend. Days pass before Johannes begins to recover. Florian spends many days helping and assigns soldiers the duty of doing whatever Ben asks of them in an effort to help her heal Johannes.

When Johannes is recovered enough to travel, the group sets out for Montagne. One day Johannes asks Florian to tell the story of his encounter with the Princess of Montagne. Florian reveals that Sophia had brutally accused him of killing her husband and ordered him out of the kingdom. When he finishes the story, he asks Ben what Ben thinks of Sophia after hearing that story, and Ben says Sophia is a dedicated ruler. Ben, caught up in her anger, then attacks Florian verbally. She says Florian talks of love and the fact that everyone has a right to be happy. He has been clear in his disdain of the princess but plans to kiss her, hoping to earn the right to marry her. Ben points out Florian is setting himself up for an unhappy life without love. Florian grows angry and has Ben chained for the remainder of the journey. Ben knows she's made a mistake because it will now be difficult to escape the soldiers.

## Chapters 11 through 13 Analysis

Ben's discovery of the cave is important because it makes the reader certain the soldiers of Drachensbett were to blame for the deaths of the royal family. She believes the words on the cave wall are that he "pursued Drachensbett" to this point but will much later realize he'd actually written that he "pursued the dragon."

Florian doesn't recognize Ben as the Princess of Montagne but he does see a resemblance. It's only much later that he makes the connection. When Florian tells the story of Sophia's angry tirade, the soldiers are outraged at the accusation. Ben, however, believes Florian's soldiers did kill her parents. What's interesting is the way Ben comes to Sophia's defense. She doesn't back up Sophia's claims with her own belief that the Drachensbett soldiers are guilty. Instead, she says that Sophia is a good ruler who deserves her place on the throne. This is an example of two of the themes -coming of age and loyalty toward one's country.





# Chapters 14 and 15

## Chapters 14 and 15 Summary

In Chapter fourteen, Ben knows she has to escape and reach the castle before Florian can wake her double. She finally does escape and cons a young boy out of a horse. She makes it to the castle but is then faced with trying to find her double before Florian. She finds her double and realizes the double is near death. She re-enters her body and has to fight for a moment to draw a breath. She opens her eyes as Florian is bending toward her but before he kisses her. Florian obviously realizes that this Princess Ben is the same person who has been held captive by his soldiers for the past weeks. He rushes from the castles with his soldiers following.

In Chapter fifteen, Sophia, Lord Fredrick, and others rejoice that Ben has awakened. She is exhausted and, after eating a meal, goes to sleep. She wakes the next day, refreshed and relieved to be back at home in the castle. She sees Florian and his soldiers below her window and travels the magic passageways to figure out what he's planning. The Drachensbett ambassador says his kingdom, because of Ben's obvious inability to lead her country, wants to declare Benevolent Succession to the throne. In essence, it means Drachensbett wants to take over the country because the country doesn't have a capable ruler. Lord Fredrick negotiates a four-month period to consider the offer and the Drachensbett ambassador agrees.

Ben is furious but admits the accusations lodged by the Drachensbett ambassador are true. He pointed out that she is lazy and cares nothing for her role as princess. Ben realizes she has done a great deal, including learning the elemental spells and surviving a period as a captive of the Drachensbett army, which proves she is a strong person. She decides she will learn to be a princess.

## Chapters 14 and 15 Analysis

There are several references to fairy tales throughout the story and Ben's efforts to reach the castle ahead of Florian is based on one of those. Everyone believes Ben's double is really Ben and that she's been the victim of a witch's spell. Florian has come to the conclusion that his kiss will break the spell. The problem with that logic is that it means Florian has come to believe he's Ben's true love. They've only met at the ball and were not together very much. They were also rude to each other and it seems unlikely that Florian was taken with Ben to the point that he believes her to be his true love. Ben is certain she hates Florian. Another reference occurred earlier in the book when the baron referred to the pea that had given him such a poor night's sleep, though the fairy tale refers to a princess who had trouble sleeping because of a pea beneath her mattress.



An interesting aspect of the spell that created a double for Ben is seen in her attitude toward the double and in her belief that Florian will be able to wake the double. Ben believes the double can be roused and that the double might very well have enough capabilities that others won't realize there's anything wrong with it.

The idea of Benevolent Succession seems a way for a stronger kingdom to lend leadership and protection to a weaker kingdom but it would also be a way for a stronger kingdom to simply take over a weaker one without a fight. When Sophia suggests they might simply refuse the offer, Lord Fredrick points out the case of a similar situation in which the weaker nation refused and the stronger nation destroyed them.



# Chapters 16 through 18

## Chapters 16 through 18 Summary

In chapter sixteen, Hildebert is the first to notice that Ben has become slimmer and Ben assumes it's a combination of her hard work while held by the Drachensbett army and the isolation of her double. Ben insists that she be allowed to join Sophia who is handling matters of the ruler's business that day rather than attending her dance class. She finds Sophia talking with a man about the possibility of Drachensbett's army crossing Ancienne. Ben suggests having a group of Montagne scouts check out the man's story and they return a few days later with news of the trail left by the Drachensbett army while they were holding Ben captive. Sophia immediately begins plans for a huge wall to keep the invaders out. Ben is so busy with learning about being a princess and using her knowledge of herbs and healing that she has no time for magic.

In chapter seventeen, Sophia is forced to answer Drachensbett's claim of Benevolent Succession and she agrees to the offer, asking only that Florian and King Renaldo evaluate Ben during the Montagne festival in October. There are some who fear King Renaldo will be angry at the request and attack anyway.

One day Sophia is questioning two men who were captured on the mountain. They claim to have been searching for a rare goat. No one believes their story but Ben suggests soldiers escort them back up the mountain with plenty of food in order for the two to finish their quest. The two immediately break down, saying they are actually Drachensbett soldiers sent to scout in preparation of an attack planned for the following night. After they are taken away, Ben says the Drachensbett soldiers believe there is a dragon on the mountain and that sending them with lots of good food would have lured the dragon to them.

Sophia immediately calls a council and learns the wall isn't finished. She joins those headed to defend the kingdom from the attack but forbids Ben's presence, saying she must remain safely in the castle in case Sophia dies. In her room, Ben conjures her double and rushes to the wizard's tower where she finds the broom is waiting. She dons one of Sophia's long red capes and flies away, planning to fly over the invading troops while pretending to be a dragon, complete with the ability to throw fire at them. She makes the first pass with a roar of fire and the Drachensbett soldiers fire arrows at her. On the next pass, she sees Florian and conjures a rock to throw directly at him. However, she creates mud instead and pelts Florian with a load of mud. However, she passes out as she spirals out of control.

In chapter eighteen, Ben wakes in her own bed and discovers the battle is over. There, a soldier recounts the battle and says the dragon had "relieved itself" on Prince Florian. Sophia swears everyone to secrecy, saying King Renaldo will have no choice but to fight another battle if it's widely known that Florian was dishonored in such a way. Ben is



then horrified when Sophia says the presence of the dragon proves that Drachensbett soldiers weren't responsible for the deaths of Ben's parents and uncle.

The day arrives when the festival occurs and King Renaldo arrives with Prince Florian and their entourage. It's learned that Florian has been nicknamed "Prince Chamber Pot" because of the belief that the dragon relieved itself on him. Sophia sends Ben to greet King Renaldo and she makes up for her earlier rudeness. King Renaldo is obviously taken with Ben and is pleased to spend time with her. Florian is furious and accuses Ben of putting a spell on his father to make King Renaldo like Ben.

## **Chapters 16 through 18 Analysis**

When she's back in the castle, Ben begins to pay attention to those around her. Rather than fighting them - as had been her habit up to this point - she notices actions and attitudes. When Hildebert offers to draw a bath for her, Ben thanks her and Hildebert reacts positively to that small show of kindness. When Ben suggests she take a more active role in learning about the business of the kingdom, Sophia and Lord Fredrick are honestly surprised. Then Ben begins to offer medical advice based on what she'd learned from her mother about herbs and curing ailments. Before long, she's loved by her people because of these simple acts of kindness.



# Chapters 19 and 20

## Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

In chapter nineteen, King Renaldo asks permission to visit King Ferdinand's tomb. Sophia asks Ben to accompany him. Renaldo, Ben, and Florian make the trip together. There, Renaldo reveals that he'd had a dream in which the true ruler of Montagne had found the tomb of the former ruler of the kingdom. Ben knows he's dreamed of her discovery of the tomb of her father, who was the former ruler and that the dream refers to Ben as the future ruler.

Just then there is a horrific scream from the mountain and Ben rushes in that direction. Florian accompanies her and they argue as they begin the journey up the mountain. Florian is angry over being called Prince Chamber Pot and Ben says she'd meant to hit him with a rock. Florian says the fact that Ben was simply incompetent doesn't make him feel better. Ben then grows angry and tells him to leave her kingdom. Florian turns his horse and heads back down the mountain.

Ben arrives in the area from which the scream originated to discover a man who is already dead. Ben's pony runs away. When the pony encounters Florian, he rushes back up the mountain to her side. Suddenly a dragon enters the clearing and Florian begins to fight with it. Florian tells Ben it's time to use her magic but she knows the elemental spells will be of little use. Florian continues to fight until Ben comes up with an idea. She taunts the dragon who rushes in her direction. Ben falls into a snowdrift and creates a double which quickly freezes. The dragon eats the frozen double which quenches his fire, killing him on the spot.

Ben rushes to Florian. He has been injured and she realizes she's going to have to sew up the wound or he'll die. He is obviously seriously hurt but tells her he is certain they will marry someday.

In chapter twenty, Ben completes the task, sewing Florian's wound. But she notes the green tinge to his cheeks and knows it's the dragon's poison. He dies in her arms and she maintains her composure until King Renaldo arrives with his men. Back at the castle, Ben rushes to the wizard's room, hoping for a spell to save Florian. The book is tightly closed and she can't open it. She goes to the mirror and says that her father is dead. The mirror agrees. She says a dragon killed her parents and uncle, and the mirror agrees. Ben says she has to save Florian and the mirror argues with her until she admits that she loves him. The mirror then says Ben already knows how the story ends.

Ben rushes downstairs where Florian's body is encased in glass and his father is preparing for the trip home. Ben pleads for a moment with him and kisses him, reviving him.



Ben says most stories end with "happily ever after," but that there is more to tell. She and Florian are married and there are trials along with the happy times. King Renaldo and Sophia wed. Ben pretends to have seen her father's tomb in a dream and leads an expedition to recover his body.

## Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

As Ben briefly describes her life with Florian as rulers of Montagne and Drachensbett, she refers back to Florian's decision to kiss her in order to awaken her from her deep sleep. It was believed by most that Ben was asleep because of the spell cast by a witch. Florian, along with many others, believed that a kiss from a handsome prince would wake Ben but Ben woke herself by returning to her body, thwarting Florian's effort. However, Florian's words and the words of the Drachensbett ambassador referring to Ben's inability to effectively lead her people prompted her to take her role seriously. She begins to study and makes herself the beloved leader of her country. Ben says that Florian did wake her to her responsibilities and throughout their lives together, Florian often points out to her that he got what he wanted.

Ben's attitude toward Sophia changes completely as she matures. She has held to her dislike of Sophia for awhile at least partly because she feels it would be disloyal to her mother to like Sophia when Prudence didn't like her. However, Ben comes to realize the two women had totally different roles in life and were from different backgrounds. They were basically destined to dislike each other. When King Renaldo asks Sophia to marry him, Ben's immediate reaction is one of surprise and then she's happy for them. However, she becomes somewhat selfish as she realizes it means Sophia might move away from Montagne to live at Drachensbett with Renaldo. She is so worried about losing Sophia as a mentor that she considers forbidding the marriage. She says it would be her right as ruler of the kingdom. However, she doesn't and Sophia and Renaldo live in Montagne for a few years, obviously intent on helping Ben find her way as ruler.



# Characters

## Benevolence

Known as Ben, Benevolence is the princess of Montagne and heir to the throne. She has just turned fifteen as the story opens and lives a protected life as the only child of her parents, Prince Walter and Princess Prudence, Ben has been indulged to a great degree. She loves to eat, especially sweets, and is quite chubby from overindulging. Ben's mother never got along well with Queen Sophia and Ben feels that she's betraying her mother's memory when her own feelings about Sophia begin to change. She is a strong character though it takes a great deal of prodding to make her face up to her responsibilities as the future queen. When Ben realizes that everyone is calling her a spoiled brat, her immediate reaction is that her feelings are hurt. However, she's a smart girl and also realizes their assessments are correct. She loves her country and knows she has to learn to be ruler if she's to protect her country. Toward that end, she sets out to learn everything she needs to know and proves herself worthy of the throne. Another important aspect of Ben's character is her ability to do magic. She discovers this about herself by accident and spends a great deal of her time working on spells. She has a sense of accomplishment from learning the magic and is dedicated to learning what the magic book indicates she must learn. This is the same level of dedication seen in her efforts to learn what's necessary to become queen.

## Florian

Prince of Drachensbett, he is a strong, independent young man who proves himself a competent ruler. Florian - called Florrie by his mother when he was very young - is repulsed by Ben's outrageous behavior on the night of the ball in which she's supposed to choose a mate. He doesn't even pretend to be interested in her after that night. When he encounters Ben later on the mountain, he notes the resemblance to the princess but accepts the fact that Ben is a young shepherd boy who became lost. When Florian realizes the truth about Ben, he doesn't tell though to have done so would have caused problems for Ben. Florian knows that Ben was the one pretending to be a dragon and believes she'd shamed him on purpose. Though he hates her action, when she is in danger from the dragon, he steps in, attempting to save her. When he's dying, he confesses his love for her. Florian is very loyal to his country, his family, and his friends. When a member of his party becomes ill on the mountain, he arranges the best possible care for the man but also spends a great deal of time helping with the hands-on care though it could mean he becomes ill as well. His love for Ben is strong and she briefly describes their lives together as husband and wife, referring to his teasing which makes her dissolve into giggles, sometimes at inappropriate times.



## Queen Sophia

Wife of King Ferdinand, she seems cold and uncaring but actually is completely devoted to Montagne. Sophia pushes Ben to become the princess the kingdom needs though it makes Ben furious. When the kingdom is in danger of being attacked, she is on the front lines, helping fortify against the invasion. However, it's Sophia who teaches Ben that kingdoms are usually protected more by diplomacy and conversation over dinner than in the battlefield.

## King Renaldo

Father of Florian and ruler of Drachensbett, he is an honorable man though he is intent initially on taking over Montagne. He is completely enamored with Ben upon his return to the kingdom after her efforts to learn everything she can about being a princess. Renaldo is heartbroken when he believes Florian to be dead. As the story comes to an end, he marries Sophia.

## Prince Walter

Ben's father, he is in charge of the kingdom's military and has no aspirations to the throne though Ben will become the ruler upon the death of Ferdinand. He is referred to as King Walter after Ferdinand's body is found though he is already dead at the time. He is devoted to Ben and teases her about the dragon atop the mountain just before he leaves for the pilgrimage to Ancienne.

## King Ferdinand

Ben's uncle, the brother of her father, and ruler of Montagne. King Ferdinand is killed on the mountain, apparently trying to defend Ben's mother from the dragon.

## Lord Fredrick

A diplomat for the kingdom of Montagne, Ben likes him most because he is kind to her at a time when she is struggling with the deaths of her parents. Lord Fredrick is the first to tell her that her life is no longer her own and that she must be willing to do what is best for the country. He is also the first to commend her on her efforts to step up and become a true princess.

## Princess Prudence

Known to her friends as "Pence," she is wife of Walter and mother of Ben. She has indulged Ben to a great degree and has allowed her to ignore her duties as heir to the





throne so that Ben struggles when the time comes for her to step into those duties. She is killed by a dragon on the mountain.

## **Lady Beatrix**

The woman who spends a great deal of time with Sophia and who is supposed to be helping teach Ben to be a lady worthy of the throne. She is unable or unwilling to think for herself and does whatever Sophia demands of her. She is somewhat cruel to Ben and seems to enjoy being rougher than she has to be.

## **Hildebert**

The woman who tends Ben's needs during the normal course of life in the castle. She is quite gruff and never seems to be overly happy about anything. When Ben sticks her head through a wall intent on scaring Hildebert, the woman simply says she isn't surprised to discover the castle is haunted and continues on her way.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Montagne**

This is the country ruled by Ben's family.

### **Ancienne**

This is the mountain that separates Montagne from Drachensbett, it is the home of the dragon that Ben believes to be a fable until she encounters it.

### **The Dragon**

This is the creature that kills Ben's mother and uncle and that fatally wounds Florian. This is also the creature that Ben pretends to be when she's fighting the invading army.

### **The Hedgehog**

This is the creature that is the mascot of Montagne and appears on the emblems of various articles of clothing and places in the castle.

### **Market Town**

This is the town by the castle.

### **Drachensbett**

This is the country ruled by Florian's family.

### **The Wizard's Tower**

This is where the spell book is kept and where Ben learns the magic spells.

### **The Peach Rooms**

These are the rooms allotted to Ben when she is first moved into the castle following the deaths of her parents.

## **The Broom**

This is the item Ben uses to fly when she learns to cast the spell for air.

## **The Cave**

This is where Ben's father's body is discovered.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

The coming of age theme is seen throughout the story as Ben strives to find her place in this new situation without her parents' guidance. An important aspect of this theme is evident in Ben's realization that people see her as a spoiled brat and that the kingdom is depending on her. Ben sets out learn everything necessary in order to fulfill her duties as queen, a task that takes a great deal of energy and perseverance. Another aspect of the theme is seen in Ben's relationship with Sophia. Initially, Ben dislikes Sophia and rebels against everything Sophia tells her to do. When Sophia tries to give her instruction, Ben ignores it or goes to great lengths to do differently. Part of the reason for her rebellion is that Ben's mother didn't like Sophia. Ben, when she begins to see a different side of Sophia, feels she is being disloyal to her mother's memory if she likes or respects Sophia. When Ben realizes that her mother was mistaken in her judgment of Sophia, Ben takes a huge step toward maturity. The coming of age theme is also seen in Ben's willingness to settle in to designated tasks. When she finds the wizard's room, she wants to learn magic but is forced to thoroughly clean the room before she is allowed to learn additional spells. She spends weeks in this task and is diligent about the work. Similarly, when she is captured by the Drachensbett soldiers, she settles in to do the assigned tasks.

## Misjudging

Ben believes the Drachensbett soldiers killed her mother, father, and uncle. When she finds her father's body in the cave she reads the inscription and jumps to the conclusion that the word he's trying to write is "Drachensbett" rather than "dragon." This, along with the fact that most people of Montagne distrust the people of Drachensbett, misdirects the reader's focus so that it seems apparent that the soldiers of Drachensbett attacked and sought to take over Montagne. Florian discovers Ben's use of sorcery and decides that she's a witch. When Ben drops the mud on Florian's head in front of all his men, they all assume that it's dragon poop. Florian believes Ben did it on purpose in order to humiliate him and doesn't believe her when she says it was merely a spell gone wrong. He also calls her a witch, a term that angers Ben because it is obviously derogatory and aimed at hurting her. Florian remembers Ben's atrocious actions when he met her the first time and can't believe that she has changed so much that his father now likes her. He accuses her of putting his father under a spell. Another important aspect of this theme is seen in the relationship between Ben and Sophia. Ben believes Sophia to be cruel and Sophia believes Ben to be lazy and uncaring of her duties. Ben comes to realize that Sophia is actually doing everything she can to keep the kingdom intact while the question of leadership is solved. She also realizes Sophia is right to seek diplomacy and sets out to learn everything she can about this aspect of being ruler. Finally, Ben learns that Sophia has difficulty relating to Ben because she doesn't have children of her own and doesn't know how to interact. Once these hurdles are cleared, Sophia



realizes that Ben is capable and only needed the correct push in order to apply herself. The characters who misjudge others are often used to further the suspense of the story. The reader is led to believe that the Drachensbett soldiers killed Ben's parents and uncle and that misdirection is a key to withholding the twist at the end of the story.

## **Responsibility for one's country**

Ben hates Sophia early in the story and bases at least part of that on her mother's attitude toward Sophia. In fact, Sophia has made the best of her situation. She came to Montagne as a bride, leaving her family behind and making a new home for herself. Once her husband is killed, she is very much alone with regard to family and could have simply handed the responsibility for Montagne's wellbeing over to someone else. However, she takes her role as queen very seriously and is trying - in her way - to groom Ben for her role in the kingdom's future. Ben doesn't at all understand why Sophia harps on the need to hone her skills of conversation until she's called on to take that responsibility for herself. However, when Ben fully realizes that she's going to have to take responsibility for Montagne's future, she does so. In Ben's case, this realization is tied closely to the coming of age theme. There are several other examples of this theme. Lord Fredrick sets out on a lengthy journey early in the story and is absent for the first several chapters as he tries to avert the war with Drachensbett. He is older and the trips and art of diplomacy are bound to require a great deal of effort, but he takes his duties seriously. Florian and his father are other examples of the theme. Both are devoted to their countries and, once Florian is married to Ben, both take responsibility for Montagne as well.



# Style

## Point of View

The story is written from the first-person perspective of Princess Ben. This limited point of view is vital to the suspense of the story. From the beginning, Ben believes the soldiers of Drachensbett are responsible for killing her mother, father, and uncle. As some come to believe that a dragon was responsible, Ben persists, believing the dragon is only a fairy tale. As the story progresses, Ben battles her feelings of love for Florian because she believes Florian's people are responsible for the deaths of her family. Florian and his father know from the beginning this is not the case but the reader doesn't learn about the dragon until Ben does. An important scene with regard to the limited perspective is seen when Ben battles the dragon. She says that she catches the attention of the dragon and then falls into the snow bank. She then says she doesn't see what's happening next and can only describe what she believes happens. She says the dragon swallows her whole. The reader is led to believe this means Ben is literally swallowed whole and that she is unable to tell what happened because she's now inside the dragon's belly. In truth, Ben has created a double of herself, quickly frozen it and put out the dragon's fire, causing its death. The story is presented as the "true" story of Princess Ben. With this presentation in mind, the limited perspective is acceptable and probably the only real option available to the author.

## Setting

The story is set in the fictional land of Montagne in a time of knights and castles. The time is reasonably correct with regard to history of the time. The niece of a ruler might very well be the only heir to the throne and royal families would live in castles. The setting is reasonable for the story and there is a great deal of description provided. For example, Ancienne is a mountain that rises above the country and its main town, Market Town. The mountain is largely unexplored which makes it possible for a dragon to reside there undiscovered. The main setting within the story is the castle itself. The castle is described in great detail. The walls of the castle are several feet thick which is explained by the legend that giants constructed the building as a stronghold. The thick walls mean there is an "ex-room" that serves as a large entrance to every room and a door is at each side of this "ex-room," which provides additional privacy for the room. When Ben discovers she has magical powers, she also discovers the ability to travel through the castle walls. The doors of these entrance rooms are always closed and Ben realizes the tradition of closing the doors was to provide privacy for those passing through the walls. There are many details about the castle rooms, including the color schemes used in some. There is also fairly extensive description of the tower room where the wizards' spell book and the magic mirror are kept. The descriptions and settings seem reasonable for the story though the use of magic and the presence of the dragon make it clear the story is fiction.



## Language and Meaning

The story is written in a straight-forward manner with an overall tone of hope and happiness though Ben is often in trouble and struggling to get through her current situation. The language is somewhat stilted, apparently in an effort to make the story seem more real. Because Ben is a princess of the kingdom, she would have been well-educated. This education is apparent in the book which is meant to be a diary of sorts. The language may be difficult for some readers to follow though the reader who practices at understanding the language may be able to overcome this. The story is presented as a diary of sorts. In the opening pages, Ben writes that she has endured many "coming of age stories" and that she always hopes the person relating the events will simply move on to another topic. While it might be that she hates to be reminded of her own coming of age tale, it seems more likely that she knows no other story could possibly come close to matching her own. A great deal of the action depends on the details common to many fairy tales. The dragons, warring kingdoms, handsome princes, and wizard's towers are all part of this story. The ending in which Ben brings Florian back to life with her kiss may seem somewhat trite to some readers.

## Structure

The story is divided into four parts. Each part is titled by number and includes a brief lead-in on the title page offering a clue as to the events in that part. Part one, "In which fate deals me a savage blow, leaving me to my own pitiably meager devices," details Ben's discovery of her mother's death and the dramatic change to her life once she moves into the castle. Chapters one through five are included in this section. Part two, "In which I make several unusual discoveries," includes chapters six through ten. In this section, Sophia discovers someone has been sneaking food to Ben and the queen locks Ben in the tower room. It's there that Ben discovers the entrance to the wizard's tower and learns several spells. Ben's double is found and she throws herself from the window as this section comes to a close. Part three includes chapters eleven through fifteen. In these chapters, Ben crashes in the mountain region and is captured by the Drachensbett soldiers. It's also in this section that Ben gets to know Florian better. Part four begins with the words, "In which my greatest horror is narrowly avoided, and then most pleasantly comes to pass. Part four includes chapters sixteen through twenty. In this section, Ben spends more time with Florian and discovers she loves him but only after he dies from the dragon's venom. She then brings him back to life with her kiss and they marry. The author depends on suspense to drive a great deal of the action. For example, chapter four ends with the thought that Ben's life couldn't possibly remain like this for long and the chapter ends with the comment that it was about to get much worse. This foreshadowing is seen in several other places throughout the book.



## Quotes

"Such musings, I realize, are more than a trifle insane, for envisioning what might have been has no more connection to our own true reality than a lunatic has to a lemon" (Chapter 1).

"As I had climbed the stone staircase more than half convinced I was en route to my execution, my initial reaction involved a fair measure of relief, for a sliver of pie is better than naught" (Chapter 5).

"Lacy Beatrix apparently believed me slovenly enough to manufacture my own dirt. The fact that I potentially could manufacture dirt was beside my point" (Chapter 7).

"My first attempt left me screaming in fright, for the figure I had created lacked arms and legs, and most resembled a dismembered corpse. Lucky I am that my room lay out of earshot of the queen, else this narrative would end now" (Chapter 8).

"With every morsel I consumed, I was informed that princes most love slender young ladies. As I was as interested in a prince's love as in sticking my fish fork into my ear, I reacted to this by cleaning my plate ever more thoroughly" (Chapter 9).

"Better I would have been at pulling parsnips out of my nose than charming any man, even if I so desired it, even if I quadrupled my studies in her unique curriculum" (Chapter 10).

"Nations larger than ours desire to claim us. If we are to survive, we must build alliances" (Chapter 10).

"Her apathy, languor, and gluttony, her patent disregard for the obligations of her rank and future position - all of which she displayed at the winer's festivities in a manner unforgettable to observers - these liabilities lead to one conclusion: that the ancient nation of Montagne will suffer grievously and perhaps perish altogether, should she rule" (Chapter 15).

"More than once I awoke in a cold terror from a dream of Prince Florian announcing I was a witch. Oddly, in the dream he murmured it fondly, stroking my hair as he leaned forward with a kiss" (Chapter 16).

"Alas, the quality of the spell did not equal my aim. Instead of granite or razor-sharp obsidian, I had created...mud" (Chapter 17).

"He, well - the beast, I mean - he, you know, relieved himself. Right on the prince" (Chapter 18).

"He did not deserve to be a frog. Not even a toadstool" (Chapter 19).





"Night after night you invade my dreams - though I would far more enjoy that lovely vision than its living counterpart" (Chapter 19).

"Then you know what to do,' my reflection whispered. 'You know how the story always ends'" (Chapter 20).

"Every fairy tale, it seems, concludes with the bland phrase 'happily ever after.' Yet every couple I have known would agree that nothing about marriage is forever happy" (Chapter 20).



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Ben? What is her life like prior to the deaths of her parents? What is her life like after their deaths? What are her strengths? What are her weaknesses?

Who is Florian? What kind of person is he? What are the major factors in his life that have affected the kind of character he becomes? What are his strengths? What are his weaknesses?

Compare Ben and Florian. What are the things that motivate them? What are their attitudes? Are the believable characters? Are they likeable?

What is Sophia's role in Ben's life? What are the things that motivate her? What are her strengths? What are her weaknesses? What does Ben think of her? What does Ben come to realize about her?

Describe how Ben and Florian become acquainted. Describe three of their meetings and how their relationship changes over the course of the story.

Describe the role of magic in the story. Describe the role of fairy tales in the story. Why is magic important? Why are fairy tales important? Is magic necessary to the story?

Who is Hildebert? Lord Fredrick? Lady Beatrix? King Renaldo? King Ferdinand? Prince Walter? Princess Prudence? What are the roles of each in Ben's life?