

The Real Boy Study Guide

The Real Boy by Anne Ursu

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Real Boy Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter One: The Cellar Boy.....	6
Chapter Two: Wolf's Revenge.....	9
Chapter Three – The Sack.....	12
Chapter Four: Scraps.....	15
Chapter Five: Magic and the Mind.....	18
Chapter Six: The Deal.....	21
Chapter Seven: Glass Houses.....	24
Chapter Eight: Secrets of the Wizards.....	27
Chapter Nine: The Shining City.....	30
Chapter Ten: Last Words.....	33
Chapter Eleven: Deciduous Ghosts.....	36
Chapter Twelve: The Magicians.....	39
Chapter Thirteen: Dirt.....	42
Chapter Fourteen: Shells.....	45
Chapter Fifteen: Bait.....	48
Chapter Sixteen – Decoctions.....	51
Chapter Seventeen: The Hole.....	54
Chapter Eighteen: The Land Remembers.....	57
Chapter Nineteen: Endings.....	60
Characters.....	64
Symbols and Symbolism.....	68
Settings.....	71



Themes and Motifs..... 73

Styles..... 78

Quotes..... 81



Plot Summary

The Real Boy by Anne Ursu is a fictional tale about a young orphan named Oscar and his transition from childhood to boy of wood and then on to young adulthood. He is hired by Master Caleb - the first magician in at least a generation, to be his hand and look after the chores considered too menial for either himself or his apprentice, Wolf, to deal with. Oscar is happy with the arrangement. He is 11 years old and socially awkward, preferring to be by himself, or in the company of the many cats who live in the cellar under Master Caleb's shop as well. Life however, has other plans.

Master Caleb is called away to the continent, leaving Wolf and Oscar to handle the shop and its contents on their own. Wolf, who enjoys anything that makes Oscar uncomfortable, takes that opportunity to force Oscar into the public. As soon as Caleb is gone, he announces that he and Master Robin's apprentice, Bonnie, are needed elsewhere and Oscar will have to run the shop in his stead. Unfortunately for Wolf, magic has begun to go awry, and both he and Bonnie are killed while in the woods. Oscar is saddled with the task of dealing with customers until Master Caleb returns, and while he manages to do so, Master Caleb's return is short-lived. He leaves again, almost immediately, and instructs Oscar to 'step up' and handle the extra responsibility for him. While attempting to act as shopkeeper, Madame Mariel, the healer, and her apprentice Callie come in for supplies. Callie is nice to him, and defends him when customers become agitated with his shortcomings. The second time Callie comes in, she does so alone. Oscar helps her, but she criticizes his manner with her, and corrects it. Then she offers him a deal. She will show him how to deal with customers if he will help her with the diagnosis of patients who have come to her since Madame Mariel left for the continent like Caleb had.

Oscar intends to do as Master Caleb instructs, but fate conspires against him. Callie comes as promised to help him cope with customers and show him how to talk to them, and she asks Oscar to come with her as she makes house calls in the City. This is another hurdle to overcome for Oscar as he's never been to the City. He takes Callie to the garden the following day as part of his deal to teach her which herbs are for what ailment, but when they arrive and enter Caleb's secret gardens, they are stunned to find something has rampaged throughout the garden, even destroying the glass house Caleb created for the more sensitive plants that wouldn't normally grow in this area. Oscar is shocked, but this is only the beginning. When Oscar opens the store again, he learns that someone has been cutting down the wizard trees that surround the City, and infuse it with the magic of the collective 100 magicians who once rooted themselves there in an effort to stop the spread of the plague. Five trees are gone, and the illusion spells that hid the fact were failing.

Caleb returns and is furious when he sees how little money Oscar has collected in the shop since he's been gone. He slaps Oscar across the face and sends him to the cellar. Later that night, as Oscar is cleaning the shop, a magical monster bursts through the wall and rampages through the shop, consuming everything magical it can find. Made of forest detritus, the monster consumes vials of potions, sweeping them off the shelf and



shoving them into its mouth. Caleb comes up when he hears the commotion, and while distracting the monster to allow Oscar to escape, he is killed. Again, Oscar's life unravels.

Callie's patient list increases daily as more and more City children are brought to her with a myriad of problems that at first seem unrelated, but she soon realizes that the problems are related to magic which like the illusion spells are failing. She and Oscar look for solutions. Oscar goes down to Caleb's workshop to see if he can find anything on the subject of failing magic, and instead comes across a hidden compartment in the floor containing a partially finished wooden boy. This discovery leads Oscar to believe that he also began life as a wooden child, which explains his social awkwardness.

When he shows Callie the wooden child, and explains his theory, she tells him she doesn't care how he started life. To her, he is just Oscar. It soon becomes apparent that the children of the City are all enchanted wooden children and the magic keeping them is unraveling. Together, she and Oscar must find a cure that works and put an end to the magical disruptions that are occurring. To do so, they must eliminate magic altogether, even though it means the end of the sacrifice made by the wizards of the past.



Chapter One: The Cellar Boy

Summary

Master Caleb lives in Barrow, the district surrounding Asteri or the Shining City. He is the first magician in a generation and like the wizards of days gone by, he has an apprentice named Wolf. He has an extra hand for menial chores named Oscar, who Wolf calls Mouse when Master Caleb isn't around. Oscar lives below Caleb's shop in the cellar. Several cats live there as well, but they usually hide when Wolf comes around.

Wolf comes down to the cellar and asks Oscar for some raspberry leaf for a Shiner. Oscar tells Wolf they don't have any but Oscar quickly mixes verbena and passionflower and takes it up to the kitchen. Wolf grabs the packets and hands them to Master Caleb who smiles and assures the woman that she has no need of such a thing, but passes the packets to her anyway telling her that they can mix up a perfume, adding things that would enhance her natural beauty if she wants and she agrees to return the following week. She opens the package, breathing deep and saying how much she loves the smell of raspberry.

Oscar doesn't understand. Wolf tells him Caleb is a genius, and makes the wizards of before look like cellar boys. He goes on to brag that Caleb is showing him everything and mid-sentence suddenly shuts up and turns around smiling, once again transformed into 'nice Wolf' for Master Caleb who is leaning in the door. Caleb asks Oscar to go to the garden to replenish supplies, especially raspberry leaves and asks Wolf to sort dried herbs in the kitchen, suggesting that it might do him good. He turns back to Oscar and says 'not bad' and suggests that in the future he add berry leaf or rosehips for smell, then winks at Oscar and leaves. Wolf turns on him, all niceties gone as he insists that Oscar will regret whatever he'd done. Oscar knows that is true, but leaves before Wolf has a chance to retaliate.

Oscar heads to Caleb's gardens in the southeast, hidden behind an illusion spell. The soil in the Barrow gives birth to hundreds of plants, shrubs and flowers, and is home to 100 great oaken wizard trees, their magic living on to infuse the earth below. Oscar knows each of the wizard trees, and can feel the warmth humming just beneath them. When he passes one, any anxiety in him stills. The gardens are perfectly organized and at the back is a house that Caleb designed to grow items not naturally found there. Panels of glass create a warm and moist environment where flowers that look like birds, butterflies and even bells grow. Oscar works trimming and cutting for two hours before the cart is full. Crow, who followed him to the gardens, curls up on the meadowsweet.

When Oscar gets back, it is almost dark. He unloads the cart and then goes back down to work with the mortar and pestle. Each plant had to be handled correctly and before long it is time for him to be in his room. Caleb is strict about Oscar remaining in his room from nine at night till morning. Pebble is lying on his bed and he washes up and joins



her. He waits until everyone is in bed, and then waits another hour before he creeps out to the library. He considers it to be a small disobedience provided he isn't caught, learning most of what he has about plants and herbs, their properties and their powers during these nightly excursions. Cat nips at his ankle and he hears footsteps coming. He tiptoes back to his room.

Analysis

Master Caleb, the first magician in Barrow for a generation is introduced as this story opens along with his apprentice Wolf and his helper Oscar. Magic is a strong theme in this first segment both in the Barrow where they live and in the surrounding forests where Oscar collects plants and herbs for Master Caleb. Once legendary wizards were commonplace, and were so powerful that when their lives as humans ended they would go into the Barrow forest and plant their feet into the earth, transforming themselves into a monument that would live on as a mighty oak, their roots infusing the land with their magic. The people of Asteri count on Master Caleb to provide them with their salves and potions; tonics and wards; and even charms and enchanted items.

Master Caleb's apprentice, with the less than subtle name of Wolf is the bane of Oscar's existence. Mean and proprietary, Wolf is self-centered and enjoys bullying Oscar at every opportunity although he miraculously transforms himself into a 'nice Wolf' whenever Master Caleb is around. Even the cats avoid Wolf whenever they can, good judges of character one and all.

Magic and how the mind can be affected by it are briefly touched on as Wolf reveals the truth about the strength of the mind and how placebos can often have the same quality of healing as a magic tonic or potion simply because the person who purchases it believes it is going to work. In this way, he believes that raspberry leaves can work as well as walnut leaves if the person using them believes what they are told rather than what their eyes and noses tell them.

Education is also a theme in this first segment as Wolf discovers that Oscar can read and resents him for having that much education despite the fact that he was an orphan who had come from the Children's Home. Oscar sneaks into the library at night, reading as much as he can about herbs and plants creating more resentment in Wolf when he realizes that Oscar likely knows more than he does.

Shining people are the name given to City people who don't actually shine but who are so perfect in every respect that they may as well. All City people seem to have perfect olive skin with elaborately sculptured hairdos and wearing clothing of such beauty that Oscar can hardly look at them.

Gardens are a theme as villagers keep gardens and pastures outside the northeast area of the forest where a fertile swath of land separates the plague lands from the eastern Barrow. Stables and barns are kept there also as farm animals didn't like the Barrow – excepting of course for Madame Catherine's goat.



The giant oaks are described as ladders for gods or giants – a simile or metaphor of the strength of the magicians they once were. This ability to transform and become a monument that thrives is a gift that the island gives to wizards who gave their lives to tend the magic there and ensure the island continued to thrive. Oscar feels the warmth within when he touches them, knowing their power infuses the earth.

Oscar considers his place in Master Caleb's house and comes to the conclusion that his life would be perfect if it weren't for Wolf, foreshadowing a possible change in his future.

Discussion Question 1

Who does Wolf harbor resentment for and how does he reveal his feelings to that person?

Discussion Question 2

What does Oscar substitute for raspberry leaves and why doesn't he use walnut leaves instead as Wolf had suggested?

Discussion Question 3

What special features does Master Caleb's garden contain and why did he create them?

Vocabulary

carnivorous, elaborate, elongated, tinctures, infused, jeopardize



Chapter Two: Wolf's Revenge

Summary

Oscar wakes hoping his secret is still safe, but when he opens the door he discovers a stack of books each title a jab at Oscar in one way or another. He puts them under his bed, and is sweeping when Wolf comes in and berates him for embarrassing him in front of Caleb. He tells Oscar how little he is worth compared to how important his status as an apprentice is and warns him that when he stops being useful, Caleb will get rid of him.

Master Caleb comes in and Wolf changes. Caleb announces he has business on the continent and will be gone for a couple of days. He asks Wolf to keep the shop open and Oscar to keep him in supplies, tasking them both with keeping things going until his return. Wolf assures him they will take care of things. Oscar goes to Mister Albert's to collect washing and then returns to the pantry until he hears two sets of footsteps come in. Three stomps shake the walls and signal Oscar is wanted. He goes up, and discovers Wolf with a tall girl who also wears an apprentice's pin. Wolf introduces her as Bonnie – Master Robin's new apprentice.

Wolf tells Oscar that he and Bonnie have business in the forest, and as such, Oscar will have to run the store. Then, despite Oscar's objections, he and Bonnie leave. Madame Mariel and her apprentice Callie come in almost right away. Oscar admits he is minding the shop but since his contact with people has been limited to Wolf and Master Caleb, he struggles to figure most people out. Madame Mariel insists she needs Caleb and Oscar repeats that he is not there several times before she finally accepts the fact. She takes two packets of chamomile and after paying Oscar, she tells him to give Caleb a message that she needs him. The door opens again and Master Julian, the magic smith, comes in followed by two villagers. He gives Oscar three gold coins for a tincture of lavender. Customers continue to come in and Oscar is overwhelmed, unable to look most of them in the eye unless forced to. Meanwhile, Oscar tears packets; drops vials; and stumbles his way through conversations. His job is complicated by the fact that he doesn't know what anything costs, so when asked, he is forced to guess often allowing customers to decide their own prices. Amazingly, they begin buying everything they can get their hands on, even things the shining people usually only bought.

Lord Cooper introduces himself, asking Oscar who he is; how old he is and how long Oscar remembers being there. When he can't answer, Lord Cooper announces that he wants to pick out an amulet for Sophie, the 5-year-old girl with him. He asks which one is the finest, but confused, Oscar tells him they are all the same. Lord Cooper decides to return another time and Oscar is more confused than ever. He is beginning to wonder if maybe Wolf was right and he belonged downstairs out of sight. For the first time ever, he wants Wolf to return. Just as night is falling, Master Robin, the guardian, enters with a sack and asks for Caleb. Oscar says he isn't there and asks what the bag contains. Robin drops it and tells him it is Wolf.



Analysis

Fear is the opening theme as Oscar wakes trying to shake off the latest nightmare by counting the tangible things around him. As soon as he is able to remind himself that he is in a safe place, his fear subsides but Wolf can bring it back without trying.

Jealousy is also a theme ongoing so far as Wolf continues to reveal how inadequate he feels next to Oscar, and does all that he can to torment him because of it. He calls Oscar an idiot, leaves books outside his door with titles like 'The Plight of the Idiot' and berates him at every turn. He tells Oscar that he has no value particularly if he stops being useful to Master Caleb.

Business is an important theme as Master Caleb announces that he has business on the continent and tasks Oscar and Wolf to keep the shop going while he is gone, reminding them that part of the business license includes being open during marketplace hours.

Condescension is Wolf's attitude to Oscar whenever Caleb is absent and especially if there is someone else around to try to impress as was the case when he summons Oscar upstairs and introduces Bonnie, Master Ronin's apprentice. He reminds Oscar how special he is; how he can read; and how he is able to grind plants and adds that he is confident Oscar will be able to cope with the shop for a day, knowing full well that Oscar is panic stricken at the thought and foreshadowing the problems Oscar is sure to have on his own in the shop all day.

Madame Mariel, the Barrow healer, and her apprentice Callie are introduced. Callie is about two years older than Caleb and like him, speaks very little. Oscar can't seem to stop himself from looking in Callie's direction, and she always seems to be looking back when he does foreshadowing further contact between them.

Body language is also a theme as Oscar struggles to understand the mannerisms and behaviors of the people who come into the shop throughout the day. With his exposure to people limited to just Wolf and Master Caleb, Oscar felt confident that he understood their looks, gestures and behaviors, but Oscar is learning that everyone is different, and mannerisms in one person don't necessarily mean the same in another.

Magic smiths are introduced and identified by cloak pins with trees on them, made by the silversmith, Mistress Alma. The pins are hardly necessary however as everyone knows who the thirty magic smiths in the region are, and even children can recite them by name – so great is their importance.

Cost and value are also themes as Oscar struggles to maintain the shop while both Caleb and Wolf are gone. He has no idea what prices are and guesses when asked, but if a customer balks at a price he sets, he is equally happy to allow them to set their own. While not a regular practice by any standards, Oscar's manner of pricing has the unexpected side effect of causing people to buy much more than they normally would have.



Insecurity is ongoing in Oscar as he forces himself to stay in the shop until the end of the day, struggling to answer questions or even just look customers in the eye when they come in. He stutters and stammers, inwardly praying that Wolf returns soon so that he can retreat to his cellar room.

Fate is the final theme as Master Robin enters at the end of the day with a sack that hits the floor with a wet sound. When Oscar asks what the sack contains, Master Robin informs him it is Wolf.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Oscar panic when he learns that Master Caleb is leaving for a few days?

Discussion Question 2

How does Wolf punish Oscar for making him look bad in front of Caleb the day before?

Discussion Question 3

What form of poetic justice is revealed to Oscar at the end of the day and why might it be both a relief and a source of further aggravation for him?

Vocabulary

assertive, emphatically, preternatural, impeccably, infused, inhuman



Chapter Three – The Sack

Summary

Master Robin tells Oscar that his new apprentice didn't return when he expected her to, and when he looked in the north end of the forest, he found them. He puts the bag with Wolf's remains on the floor and asks if Caleb is around. Oscar tells him he went to the continent for a couple of days. Oscar asks him what happened, but Robin admits he doesn't know yet.

Oscar lies in bed awake for a long time, barely aware of the fact that he's rocking back and forth. Even Pebble's gentle nudging doesn't bring him back from the place he is in. Eventually, he finally falls asleep, but his dreams are troubled and his heart is pounding when he wakes up. Caleb can tell he is still alone in the house and isn't sure what to do. He sits on his bed in a stupor neglecting his usual chores, trying to decide how he can avoid opening the shop. Just before opening, he gets dressed, eats a stale piece of bread and hopes no one will show up. He is still eating when the first knock comes and Oscar is grateful Robin had taken the sack with him.

He unlocks the door and a man and woman enter. The woman introduces herself as Mistress Jane and asks him if he knows where the apprentices were going or what spells they were trying. Master Julian and Master Charles come in and Oscar can see Callie near the healing potions. Everyone speculates, some suggesting a bear is responsible, but Oscar doesn't think so.

A villager brings a defensive ward to the counter and asks Oscar if he should buy one or two. Mistress Jane asks Oscar to pretend he knows what killed them and then recommend a charm. Oscar insists she isn't making sense. Finally Julian clears his throat and tells them not to harass Oscar who is an orphan and simple. Julian reminds them that apprentices make mistakes, often trying magic beyond their capabilities and even if it was a bear, they have the bounty of the Barrow at their disposal to protect them. Suddenly the air seems to lighten and customers begin taking things off the shelves, and paying Oscar.

A woman from the City comes in with a young girl and the crowd quiets, the villagers bowing their heads. She tells Oscar she needs Caleb insisting something is wrong with the girl, but all Oscar can offer is the healer – Madame Mariel. Pebble approaches, growling low in her throat. The young girl shrieks and the lady insists Oscar have Caleb call as soon as he returns, leaving her card on the counter. Oscar fears he is in trouble but just then Callie walks up and mutters about people believing they know everything. She crumples the woman's card, telling him Caleb will never know. The shop clears out and more City people arrive. Finally the shop empties and Oscar realizes that to open in the morning he will have to spend the night preparing things. Despite how tired he is, his mind relaxes with the thought. He is about to lock the door when Malcolm the baker arrives with the bread Oscar was supposed to pick up earlier.



Oscar tells Master Malcolm that Wolf is dead, and tells him he is out of protective spells but would be happy to give him something to help bread rise or make it keep. He babbles on, making suggestions until he finally runs out of things to say. Malcolm hands him the bag, saying there are extra buns inside. He leaves and Oscar takes his bread downstairs with him. He has so much work to do, but all he wants to do was go to his room and bring in as many cats as he can. When he reaches the cellar, he hears a door close. Caleb has returned.

Analysis

Fear is the opening theme in this segment again as Oscar learns that Wolf is dead and so is Master Robin's apprentice, Bonnie. Master Robin can see how close Oscar is to falling apart, and suggests he go downstairs telling him he doesn't have to worry. He sits on his bed, in shock for some time before finally going to sleep. It is ironic that Master Robin returns Wolf in a sack as had his true nature and behavior been known, he likely would have been 'sacked' or fired from his position as Caleb's apprentice.

Nightmares continue to be a theme as Oscar dreams about the immensity of the sky as it threatens to swallow him. The sky is compared to a monster that is bottomless and can eat a person up.

Oscar wakes the next morning and is overwhelmed with uncertainty as he considers how to handle the store and its customers. He almost manages to convince himself that he can stay closed and avoid people, but when the time to open draws near, he manages to find his courage although part of him hopes no one will come.

Oscar's affinity toward animals is reinforced in this segment as he listens to the customers in the store speculate that a bear may have been responsible for what happened to Wolf and Bonnie. Oscar's experience with bears agreed with everyone's assessment that they could be huge, but Oscar knows them to be friendly if you know how to talk to them.

Protection becomes an important theme as it seems that almost every customer wants a potion; a tonic; or a charm that will ward away evil and keep them safe from whatever it was that killed the two young apprentices.

A lady from the City comes in with her daughter and Oscar compares the child, like the other City children, to the finest flowers in the garden – too perfect to have anything wrong with them. She is so perfect that even adults from the City pale beside her and Oscar can't imagine how anything could be wrong. Pebble however has other ideas, hissing and growling at the child, seeing or smelling something that no one else can.

Callie comes to Oscar's rescue, taking the card left by the lady and her daughter from the City and crumpling it up. She suggests that Oscar simply pretend, insinuating that things would be alright if he did.



Suspicion is also a theme as customers come and go in the shop, each speculating as to how much Oscar really knows and isn't sharing. Oscar tries to convince them that he doesn't know anything, but the more he denies knowledge, the more he is accused of being shifty and hiding the truth.

Mister Malcolm is introduced as the baker; a man who pays attention to his customers and notices when a regular doesn't come in as scheduled. In this case, it is Oscar who neglects to pick up his order, and Mister Malcolm thoughtfully delivers it. When Oscar tries to return the favor, offering him a spell or decoction, Malcolm refuses, insisting he needs nothing and revealing his desire to remain magic-free.

The differences between spiritual and physical illness is touched on as a lady from the City enters with her daughter and tells Oscar that she needs Caleb because something is wrong with her daughter. Oscar immediately recommends she take her daughter to a healer, but she is adamant that who she needs is Caleb. Pebble begins behaving strangely around the girl as well, suggesting an unseen issue that the cat is able to sense or see perhaps.

Discussion Question 1

What do Mistress Jane and Buford think when they come into the store, and what accusations are made?

Discussion Question 2

Who calms down the customers in Caleb's store and what is said that changes the demeanor of the clientele?

Discussion Question 3

What does Oscar realize when he finally manages to close the store and how does this realization affect him?

Vocabulary

emanating, exuberant, decoction, comparison, finality



Chapter Four: Scraps

Summary

Oscar wonders what will happen if Caleb decides not to keep him. He is standing outside Caleb's door trying to decide whether or not to knock when Caleb opens the door. Oscar tells Caleb that Wolf is dead and asks if he knows what happened. Caleb has ideas, he admits adding that Wolf was reckless and involved himself in matters that were beyond his abilities. Then Caleb admits that although he brought Oscar on as his hand, he requires him to step up now and help keep the shop running smoothly while he handled business on the continent and dealt with matters in his workshop. He assures Oscar that he will simply have to do the best that he can and remain open as much as possible. Caleb promises to find a new apprentice when things settle. Then, as though nothing happened, he gives Oscar a rather long list for collection in the forest the following day.

Oscar listens to Caleb's instructions carefully and then goes back to his room, still amazed and grateful that it would continue to be his room. He tells Pebble about their conversation, and decides he won't disappoint him. The next morning he and Crow are in the woods early. Oscar wants to collect the honey mushrooms first and knows that they exist only under the wizard tree in the center of the Barrow. The red mushrooms grew at its feet. Then he makes his way around picking berries, bark and leaves; and trying to keep his mind focused on the task at hand – nothing more but inevitably he would think about Wolf and summon his voice in his head. It takes a while to shake him, but then he maps his day and the work he has ahead of him. He sees a pile of scraps and bits and they call to him so he gathers them up and puts them in his bag.

When Oscar gets back to the market, he discovers Callie waiting impatiently. She asks why the store is closed to all but City people and when it will reopen for them. Oscar doesn't know, but says if there is something particular she needs, he may be able to get it for her. Relieved, she admits that Madame Mariel is treating someone with Barrow ivy hives. Oscar knows exactly what ingredients he needs. He tells her he'll be right back, ducks around the back of the shop and quickly mixes an extra helping for her. Just as she is taking it from him the door to the store opens and a City boy a bit younger than Oscar comes out. He walks up to them and asks for help, asking them if he knows them. Callie asks if he's come in to the healers, but he doesn't seem to remember that, or much of anything else. A City lady comes out of the shop and the boy whispers that she told him she's his mother, clearly not believing it, but calling him Ronald, she mutters about the quality of person he is talking to. Callie takes no offense, saying she expects it of someone of the Duchess's status. Callie and Oscar talk about Ronald for a moment longer, Oscar sure that Master Caleb could help. Callie wishes there was something she could do and while she ponders the solutions available to her, Oscar does the same with the ingredients available to him.



Analysis

Insecurity is the first theme presented in this section as Oscar worries about his status with Master Caleb. His own history is so muddled that he isn't sure what would happen to him then and the idea is terrifying. The relief he feels when Caleb not only keeps him but gives him more responsibility is both terrifying and exhilarating as Oscar is so happy to be staying that he almost forgets how hard it was to run the store. Much of this insecurity comes from Wolf who was such an abusive and abrasive personality and picked on Oscar so often that even after he is gone, Oscar can hear his jibes and nasty comments in his head. He made Oscar feel as though his shortcomings were a product of his very existence – something Oscar is unable to dispute. Wolf took great pleasure in reminding Oscar that he was an outsider; that he came from Eastern Aletheia where there was no magic... just farmland and sea. Oscar can't remember that far back. Five years ago is fuzzy and just a collection of shadows and moments that make him feel anxious when he tries to think of them. He vaguely remembers Caleb coming to the Home and on that day or soon thereafter going across the river to work in the Barrow as Caleb's hand.

Medicinal herbs are an ongoing theme as Oscar is sent to the forest with a shopping list from Caleb that includes foxglove; willow bark, honey mushrooms, white pine needles, walnuts dragon's breath, baneberry and red clover along with other items that he will carefully process later.

Friendship begins to bloom between Oscar and Callie as she comes to the shop in the hopes of obtaining something for Barrow Ivy. Oscar is still so insecure in himself and his knowledge that he doesn't want to tell her that he'll mix something for her, thinking she wouldn't trust it if she knew it came from him. Instead, he claims to have fetched it from Caleb.

Ronald is introduced as the son of the duchess from the City, and his illness is revealed as one that is likely caused by some kind of magic. Magic as a theme is also present in the conversation between Callie and Oscar in which she reveals a man came to them with Barrow Ivy which is said to create a magical itch. Ronald's forgetfulness seems to have a more magical rather than physical source and both Callie and Oscar wonder if they will be able to help.

Callie reveals her distaste for the preferential treatment given to the City people when they are given access to Caleb's store while the Barrow is locked out for the day. She takes the fact that the duchess refers to her and Oscar both as wretches, as though the fact that she is a duchess excuses her rudeness as normal or expected while Oscar is horrified that the duchess painted him and Callie with the same brush.

Healing is a theme that surrounds the lives of both Oscar and Callie who approach healing from different perspectives. Their similarities and their encounters seem to suggest or foreshadow a growing relationship as they have much in common.



Discussion Question 1

What emotions replace the intense worry that Oscar has over what happened to Wolf and to his unnerving experiences in the store and why?

Discussion Question 2

What does Oscar do that eases Callie's mind and why does he choose to deceive her about it?

Discussion Question 3

What issue causes Ronald to speak to Oscar and Callie despite the differences in their status and why is Ronald so concerned?

Vocabulary

persuade, agitating, compromised, wretches, hysterical



Chapter Five: Magic and the Mind

Summary

Oscar finishes working, and hears Caleb locking up the shop for the night. He waits four hours before heading for the library. This time he looks through all of the subjects at his level and realizes that to find anything to do with magic, he would have to climb the ladder. He puts his fear aside and begins climbing, looking only at the books in front of him. He passes books on all subjects, until he finally he sees the kinds of books he is looking for. He selects 'Magic and the Mind' and as an afterthought, grabs one titled 'Secrets of the Wizards' as well. He climbs down carefully, and curls up in a chair. Opening Magic and the Mind he begins reading, but the book makes little sense to him. It has no diagrams or explanations; instead the sentences seem to go off in different directions and even the scribbles in the margins make no sense to him. The spells listed include Blood Calling; Living Enchantments; the Breath of Life; Black Mirror and more. He finds spells to implant memories, but nothing to restore them. Then he realizes that if Caleb with his knowledge and experience couldn't fix Ronald, it was highly unlikely he could.

The next morning Oscar begins a normal Friday, getting cheese; sweeping and dusting the shop and running errands. The full shelves reveal Caleb had been working as well. There is even a new shelf with blankets and a note 'Will obscure what lies beneath'. Then Oscar goes back down to the cellar to work, grateful that Caleb is upstairs in the shop. Later, he goes up to extract oil from the previous harvest and overhears some of the interactions between Caleb and the customers. Barrow parents ask if Caleb has chosen a new apprentice, offering children they say show promise; and Caleb reassures customers it is his honor and duty to keep them safe.

When he hears Callie's voice asking for more treatment for hives as now the family is entirely affected, Oscar holds his breath. Caleb asks her the source of the hives. When she reveals it was Barrow Ivy, Caleb tells her he will have to make something up. Before he can do that, two young City girls come in seeking a love potion on the advice of Madame Lara the soothsayer. Caleb recommends a special potion to help them tap into their own instincts as well. He calls out to Oscar, asking him to bring the ingredients up just as one of the girls turns and knocks over a shelf of tinctures. A number of them fall and break and one girl tells Caleb he should shelve things more carefully. Without thinking Oscar insists they were fine provided that no one hit them with their purse causing one girl to ask Master Caleb why he keeps such creatures. Oscar insists Crow is a cat, prompting gales from both at Oscar's expense.

Oscar goes back to the pantry and processes the Camellia Caleb imported. Finally night comes and Caleb calls him. Although Oscar is braced for trouble, Caleb simply announces that he has to return to the continent and Oscar will have to watch the shop. He adds that he chose Oscar because Oscar was the boy no one wanted and he believed that as such, he would work harder. The fact that he is odd was fine for



working in the pantry, but when in the shop he tells Oscar he will not be odd as though simply saying it made it so.

Analysis

Oscar sneaks into the library again, after waiting four full hours after Caleb retired, foreshadowing an upcoming discovery by Caleb at some time in the future. He compares his hours in the library as things that are stolen, and is acutely aware of how careful he has to be with the time he has.

Fear is also a theme again as Oscar's fear of heights is revealed. It takes courage to climb to a height three times his size, but the fact that Callie thinks he is kind propels him upward in the hope that he might find something to help Ronald. Fear also comes into play when Callie comes in asking Caleb for more Barrow Ivy treatment. Oscar fears discovery when Callie asks for more of what he'd given her the day before, but Caleb says nothing. Despite that, fear is Oscar's companion after he chastises a young girl from the City for knocking over an entire shelf of tinctures and then blaming Caleb for shelving them incorrectly. He goes downstairs, sure that he will hear about his comment later, but when Caleb calls him, it is to tell him he is going to the continent again and Oscar will have to mind the shop.

The library is revealed as a source of unending information on a vast variety of subjects. To date, Oscar had confined his interest to plant magic, herbs and botany, but this time he wanders through taking note of the categories available. There is a huge history section; books about astronomy; mathematics; metaphysics; anatomy and bestiaries, philosophy – both natural and supernatural, climate studies; zoology; horticulture and agriculture. Finally, at the top of the ladder he finds the subject matter he is looking for.

Apprenticeships are discussed as parents from Barrow attempt to put their children in line to replace Wolf as Caleb's apprentice. The duke paid parents of apprentices handsomely so it was unlikely that he would do so if a child didn't have aptitude or magic.

Customer service is a theme that constantly eludes Oscar, and one that Caleb excels at. Caleb listens as he reassures some; encourages others; and seems able to provide what each individual customer needs to leave the shop satisfied with their experience. Although Oscar is able to identify the different customers by their tone and speech, he is tongue tied when it comes to serving them.

Caleb reveals the reasons he selected Oscar over all of the other children in the Home, assuring him that he had been selected precisely because no one else wanted him. Caleb believed that by selecting Oscar over all others, he would work harder for him and be more diligent and loyal than just any other boy. Oscar is determined to show Caleb he can cope with the extra responsibility and when Caleb insists that despite the fact that he is somewhat odd, Oscar will not be odd when working in the shop. He tries



to hold on to the feeling those words inspire in him, but they turn to liquid when he tries to grasp them.

Discussion Question 1

What book does Oscar look through on Ronalds' behalf and why is it of no help to him?

Discussion Question 2

Who causes the accident that upends a shelf full of tinctures, and what happens as a result?

Discussion Question 3

What does Caleb tell Oscar he expects of him and why is it likely that Oscar will do better this time than he did the last time he was in charge?

Vocabulary

replenishing, meticulously, ravenous, bestiaries, inherently



Chapter Six: The Deal

Summary

In the dark of night, the truth of the past is revealed to Oscar and he can hear Wolf's voice in his head telling him he isn't right. As far back as the Home, he hears the voices saying he won't be taken by anyone. Crow hops onto his chest and begins to purr, her voice a quiet 'shhh' that lulls him to sleep. By morning, Caleb is gone and Oscar is determined to work hard and be loyal. He tells himself he won't be odd.

When he opens the shop, Callie is waiting. He steps aside but she stands there and asks if Caleb is in, but he tells her that he is away so she tells Oscar she needs barberry. He asks if someone is following her, and she says no, but someone has an awful headache. When he insists she needs butterbur she tells him that he was rude. Oscar doesn't understand and Callie tries to explain the correct way to tell someone that they are wrong if you believe they are. Oscar tries it her way, and she asks if she can tell him a secret. She admits that Madame Mariel is gone to the Eastern Villages, something she does once a year. Oscar knows the duke considers it illegal to practice in the east but Caleb had created a shield that let magical items survive the plaguelands. She admits that she's been alone four days already and that she doesn't have any magic. Oscar is shocked.

Without thinking, he offers to help her learn about herbs and remedies and she returns the favor, offering to give him lessons in customer service. He gives her the butterbur and some feverfew and she promises to return later. He works alone until she comes back and Oscar is grateful. For the rest of the afternoon, he listens and tries to memorize the right phrases. Mistress Margaret comes in with a complaint about her chickens, and Roger says his goats are troubled as well. Another man admits his pigs are behaving strangely as well and Oscar tells Callie to give them all passionflower. She tells them and they relax, reassured by her. After they all leave, Callie says goodnight and Oscar goes down to the cellar. The next day is Sunday and the shop will be closed. Oscar decides to ask Callie to come to the gardens with him in the morning. He remembers the pieces of wood he'd picked up the other day, and begins to carve one piece, unsure of what he is making. He keeps going anyway, creating a small wooden cat.

Analysis

Insecurity continues to be a theme in Oscar's life as he replays his personal history, remembering all the times that people have told him there is something wrong with him; that he isn't quite right in the head; that no one will ever take him from the Home; and insisting he look people in the eye. He comes to the realization that he has always been different; off in some way. Callie reveals that she struggles with insecurity as well, but



Callie's concerns stem from the knowledge that she has no magic – unlike other apprentices who all are magical in some way.

Responsibility is also a theme that recurs as both Callie and Oscar struggle with the weight of the responsibility put on them to look after customers while their masters or mistresses are gone. They both feel inadequate for the task in their own way.

Loyalty is a theme that recurs as well, with both Oscar and Callie trying to maintain the level of professionalism expected from them by their Master and Madame. Both are required to keep the businesses open and both prefer that no one know they are gone, leaving Callie and Oscar in a difficult position at times; Oscar when trying to explain that he has no idea when Caleb will return, and Callie trying to maintain an aura of knowledge despite having no magical ability whatsoever.

Anxiety and agitation are themes that plague the animals of Barrow, several customers coming in and seeking treatment for either their goats; chickens; and even pigs that are exhibiting signs of distress. Caleb recommends that they all try passionflower.

Knowledge and education are important in this segment also as both Oscar and Callie suffer through their own brands of hell because of their own inabilities or lack of education in their fields. While Oscar struggles to deal with customers each day – something that is definitely not his forte, Callie is also struggling to successfully treat the people who come to see Madame Mariel only to find she is not available.

The differences between the City people and those from Barrow are revealed as Oscar and Callie work in Caleb's shop. Barrow residents come in seeking cures for animals that are agitated and anxious while City people come in wanting more frivolous items such as Caleb's True Love Powder.

Discussion Question 1

What does Oscar do that makes Callie tell him he is rude and how does she correct him?

Discussion Question 2

What deal do Callie and Oscar make and how is it likely to benefit them both?

Discussion Question 3

What does the City lady think people from Barrow are a superstitious bunch and what about her purchase makes her statement seem rather incredulous to both Callie and Oscar?

Vocabulary

bemused, obscuring, errant, studiously, superstitious



Chapter Seven: Glass Houses

Summary

Nightmares plague Oscar again until he finally wakes with a start as his dream self falls into the blankness of his dream. He realizes that he is holding onto the wooden cat he carved the night before, and names it Block. Since morning is still hours off, Oscar picks up “Secrets of the Wizards” and goes upstairs, feeling safer there than he did in the cellar for the first time.

The first page announces that it is the official chronicle of Aletheia’s wizards, promising to record the knowledge and entrusting that future generations will continue to do the same. It is followed by their credo, and promise to serve Aletheia and its magic – a reminder of their oath and honor. The wizards found magic in all manner of life from the behavior of animals to the movement of the planets and the tides of the ocean. The more Oscar reads, the more he feels as though he knows the wizards. Nikola was interested in animal magic while Theodore’s interests were tied to the sky, noting the constellations and their movements. Elia loved plants and Oscar knows many of her entries to be proven true. Generations pass and Oscar feels each loss as new wizards replace those who went on to become the wizard trees. The island replaced each wizard, one for one, matching the one hundred wizard trees. He reads until morning banishes the night.

A knock at the back door reveals Mister Malcolm who assuming Oscar wouldn’t come to his shop had come with his delivery. He asks if Caleb is away, and Oscar confirms he had business that took on the continent. Malcolm sees the book on the table. Pebble yowls and Cat adds his attention as Malcolm divides a roll into pieces for them, telling Oscar that he used to keep cats as well but they tended to put teeth marks in his merchandise. He tells Oscar that he thinks most animals don’t like magic other than the kinds of magic in the forest, but that cats are different because magic doesn’t like them. Oscar offers him small enchantments but Malcolm assures him he doesn’t need enchantments to bake bread, and adds that he was a magician at one time. He chose to quit when people began treating magic like something cheap – a commodity meant to serve their pleasures. He offers his assistance to Oscar, should he need it while his master is away, and Oscar asks if he should call him Master Malcolm. Malcolm is insistent that he should not.

Oscar goes to Madame Mariel’s looking for Callie, and knocks on the door without thinking. She answers and he announces it is his turn to help her, inviting her to come to the garden with him. She agrees and he babbles uncertainly for a minute until she stops him by agreeing to go. Callie tells him she grew up in the Eastern Villages, and Oscar figures she must have shown promise that was exceptional. Callie simply says Madame Mariel had her reasons.



They get to the entrance of the garden and Oscar stops for a second before stepping through, and when he does, he hears a large gasp from Callie. He opens his eyes to discover that the gardens are wrecked. A large swath divides them and the glass house is in shards. Stunned, he follows the scar through the gardens. Callie asks what happened and who did it, but Oscar doesn't hear. She puts a hand on his shoulder and asks him to say something. When he doesn't, she suggests they go back to the shop to try to figure things out, pulling him along with her.

Analysis

Dreams continue to plague Oscar, who now dreams that he is the last living soul in the forest – a metaphor for how he feels in life; alone and unprepared. When he wakes, even the darkness is too much for him, and he leaves the familiar surroundings of his room to go upstairs where for some reason he feels safer.

Education is a theme ongoing for Oscar whose thirst for knowledge has him stealing into the library late at night once everyone is asleep, and who even overcame his fear of heights in order to take several references from the magic on the top shelf.

Secrets are also a theme as Mister Malcolm reveals his former life as a magician, and the reasons he no longer practices choosing to bake bread instead. Malcolm and Oscar discuss why animals don't like magic (with the exception of cats) and Malcolm reveals his opinions as to how magic has evolved in the region. He tells Oscar that people started using magic as a way to fix all of their problems, treating magic as though it were a parlor trick or a commodity to serve their pleasures.

Courage is a rare theme for Oscar as he goes to Madame Mariel's in the hopes of finding Callie, wanting to take her to the gardens with him. His courage almost fails him when she answers, and he babbles on until she speaks breaking the spell.

Callie and Oscar discuss magic. She grew up without magic and doesn't see the need for it that most people do, insisting that magic isn't required to apply herbs or mix them together. Oscar insists that magic is the product of herbs mixed to create a decoction or cure.

The gardens, a source of great joy for Oscar, have been damaged. The glass house is broken beyond repair and Oscar retreats into himself, shocked and stunned. Callie tries talking to him, but Oscar is remembering Wolf in bits and pieces, comparing it to the bits and pieces left around him.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Oscar worry that someone will catch him reading the books from the library, and how might he solve this issue?



Discussion Question 2

What secret does Malcolm reveal to Oscar, and what reasons does he give for the decision he made?

Discussion Question 3

What do Callie and Oscar discover in the gardens and what are their reactions?

Vocabulary

expelled, notable, commodity, mesmerizing, unintelligible, cultivated



Chapter Eight: Secrets of the Wizards

Summary

Callie helps Oscar to keep moving forward, and he puts one foot in front of the other, in deep shock. When they get closer to the edge, Callie tells him she has no idea how to get home. Oscar leads her back to the shop where she makes him passionflower tea and tries to get him to talk. She suggests they tell Master Robin, the Barrow guardian. She takes his hand and asks if she can take him anywhere. Mister Malcolm comes to mind, but Oscar remembers he wants nothing to do with magic, so he says no. Callie insists he come with her and leads him through the village to a group of houses, pointing one out as Master Robin's. She knocks, but no one answers. Next door, Mistress Penelope tells them that Master Robin is on the continent with Master Caleb. She goes on to say that Madame Mariel is there as well, but Callie argues she went to the Eastern Villages. Callie asks how she knows this, and Mistress Penelope claims she heard the plans discussed. She adds that stores are going up now. Oscar wants to go home.

Oscar insists he'll be fine so Callie leaves and Oscar goes down to his room, curling up on his bed the same way he had when Wolf was killed. He can hear Wolf's voice leering about the coincidence of the damage and asks if Oscar still thinks his death was accidental. Oscar lights every lantern and begins to read again, guardian wizard ghosts surrounding him and keeping him safe. He reads about how the export of magical goods had begun and how the wizards had worried the trade would overtax supplies meant to meet the needs of the area, not the continent. The duke refuses to listen. Another difference Oscar notices is that although wizards today still concerned themselves with the stars; animal magic; spiders and mushrooms, they never spoke of making luck, or attracting wealth or love with magic. Instead, they concerned themselves with the natural world from the roots to the plants and animals above, and extending to the sky. He reads on, and realizes that wizards had died out and he worries that the end of the book would be the end of wizards.

A wizard named Galen writes most of the entries now. One page diagrams an oak tree with roots reaching down and arrows travelling up the root to the surface, designating it as a regular tree while the one next to it had arrows drawn down to the soil through the roots and Oscar realizes in that moment how the wizard trees worked. It was elegant; and perfect.

The last entry reveals the plague and how it leached magic from the land along with all life. It adds that soon 'everyone in Aletheia will be damned'. After that, only empty pages follow. Oscar closes the book and thinks about how the world is changing and there is nothing he can do.



Analysis

Oscar is in shock when he sees the damaged garden and glass house. Everything shuts down in his mind, and he is lucky that Callie is there to help him return home, her friendship becoming more and more important in Oscar's life. At home she gives him passionflower tea, remembering that he'd recommended it to Barrow folk who had anxious animals.

The Barrow village is described, Oscar noting the differences between living below the shop and living in houses as some people like Master Robin did. Callie leads Oscar to his house, but he is not available.

Mistress Penelope is introduced, and as Master Robin's neighbor, she informs Callie and Oscar that he is gone. He'd left with Master Caleb for the continent and Callie doesn't believe her at first, especially when she adds that Madame Mariel had gone with them as well. Callie asks and learns that the information came from open windows and good ears which make secrets impossible.

Safety is a theme and something Oscar desperately wants as he learns that Master Robin is gone as well. All he wants is to go home, so Callie takes him there, and he finally convinces her that he'll be fine. She leaves him there and he huddles inside, all lanterns lit, reading the wizards chronicle. Wolf continues to 'speak' to Oscar, leering at him and mentioning what a coincidence it is that he died and the glass house was wrecked in the same week. Ironically, the dukes of days gone by had encouraged magical trade with the continent while the duke in charge today forbade it completely, and Oscar wonders about it. He also notices that there are no discussions of love potions or luck charms and the like in those days.

Plague is the subject of the final entry, and a wizard named Galen insists that soon everyone will be damned and nothing will be left. Oscar understands that things are changing, and much like Galen, there is nothing he can do about it.

Discussion Question 1

What do Callie and Oscar learn from Miss Penelope and why does the revelation disturb Callie?

Discussion Question 2

What does Miss Penelope reveal about the purpose of trips to the continent and what part of her reasoning makes no sense?



Discussion Question 3

How does Oscar cope when he gets back to the shop, and what does he learn that evening and from whom?

Vocabulary

reemerge, transformed, rational, apparently, clever, rupture



Chapter Nine: The Shining City

Summary

Monday morning dawns and Oscar tries to do things that are normal, despite the fact that everything is wrong. Callie arrives to check on him and tells him she spoke with the blacksmith who told her that bad weather could adversely affect a garden, and glass houses weren't viable anyway. Besides, he added, if there was a disturbance in the forest, they were safe in the Barrow village. Oscar adds that the City is safer, but Callie argues asking if magic made the City.

Callie admits she doesn't understand the Barrow or City people. She can't understand why Caleb would leave right after his apprentice was killed, opting to care more about making money on the continent. Callie offers to stay a while, and Oscar is grateful. He stays in the background, memorizing the phrases she uses. After she leaves, he repeats them even when they didn't precisely fit. That night, he reads again until sleep overcomes him.

The next morning Callie knocks on the door early and asks Oscar to come to see patients with her. Oscar assures her he can't go, but she reminds him they had a deal and she was calling in her portion of it. Without thinking, he locks up and follows her to the City. As they walk, Oscar realizes that there is no magic where they are and Callie explains that they are going to see two very sick children and that she has no idea what to do. When Oscar still doesn't understand Callie's issue, she tells him the truth about her becoming an apprentice – how it was a debt her parents paid by giving her to Madame Mariel. She admits that she isn't supposed to contact her family, but she'd sent a note to the healer asking if Madame Mariel had arrived and if Nico was alright.

The City walls are high, reminding Oscar of the wizard trees. Hedges are sculpted and phoenixes fly on the flags. She bows at the gate, motioning for Oscar to do the same and tells the guards they were invited. They are admitted and make their way past the courtyard and fountain to the house Callie had been summoned to. Oscar asks what he is supposed to do, and Callie suggests he just pretend, but Oscar has no idea how to do that either. Callie introduces herself and they are taken upstairs to a bedroom where a young boy lies in bed. His body seems sunken into the bed, and his pallor is more green/gray and white, including his lips.

Oscar looks at the young girl sitting near the bed, and recognizes her as Sophie, the girl Lord Cooper had brought in to the shop. Callie is busy with her brother Hugo, and Oscar can't help but reach out and pat her reassuringly on the head like he did when Pebble looked the same way. He didn't realize until after that she'd been frightened.

When they leave, Oscar asks what's wrong with the boy, but she doesn't know. She tells him that the boy's hands and feet are cold and swollen, his pulse is faint and he is weak. Oscar had believed that the City was protected. Callie tells him not anymore.



Analysis

Routine is the first theme as Oscar tries to maintain a sense of normalcy to calm himself but inside, he is acutely aware that nothing is the same anymore. The whole issue is causing great disquiet in him.

Callie and Oscar debate the merits of the City; Oscar convinced that the City is a direct result of magic and Callie believes that there is no way magic could have affected the way the City sprang up, and doesn't believe City residents have any right to put themselves above those who live in the Barrow.

Expressions are an ongoing theme as Oscar tries to figure out how to map feelings so that he can recognize them. He's learned to see what anger is in Callie, but still struggles to decipher the different mannerisms and facial expressions that signal a particular emotion.

Hope is what Oscar clings to as he reassures Callie that Caleb will return and make things right, but Callie sees things differently. She struggles to understand why Caleb abandoned the Barrow at a time just after his apprentice dies under mysterious circumstances in favor of the money that may be made on the continent for the sale of magic – magic that didn't appear to be working for the very people it was supposed to in the first place.

Customer service is also an ongoing theme as Callie takes her part of their bargain to heart and helps Oscar to navigate the correct and polite way to deal with people who come into the shop. Oscar continues to commit her responses to memory so that he can use them after she is gone. Unfortunately, the responses when used exactly do not always fit exactly, or the customers continue to converse after he's run out of correct responses, confusing him further and making him wish he had a better 'roadmap' for the way people talk to each other.

Fear continues to be an ongoing theme as well. Oscar must overcome his fears of dealing with people, new places, and meeting new people, and he is forced to do them all at the same time when Callie comes to the shop the following morning and insists that she join him on a house call. He balks at first, but she reminds them of their agreement. When they get underway, she reveals that they are going to the City – somewhere Oscar had never been and he almost balks again, but she continues to reassure him while she makes it clear that she needs him and he has no choice.

Illness is a theme that is growing as this segment reveals two City children who are very ill – something that shouldn't happen within the protected area of the City. Callie is the only healer available and Oscar is reassured by the presence of her even if she is only an apprentice.

Secrets are revealed as Callie explains how she became an apprentice to Madame Mariel. She tells Oscar how her brother became ill when she was the apprentice to their village's healer. Nico, her younger brother, required ongoing treatment that her parents



could not afford, so they offered her the free and ongoing services of their eldest daughter as an apprentice and although Callie displays no magical ability whatsoever, Madame Mariel agrees to the bargain. Since then, Callie had been acting more as the healer's gopher than her apprentice and as such, felt wildly out of her league in this instance.

Discussion Question 1

What differences are there between Callie and Oscar's impression of the City and its origins?

Discussion Question 2

How does the deal Oscar made with Callie begin to unfold and in what ways might it be beneficial to Oscar that he hadn't considered?

Discussion Question 3

What secret does Callie reveal to Oscar and how does that affect her ability to function without Madame Mariel around?

Vocabulary

accumulated, unadulterated, immobilize, exuberant, momentous, embellishments



Chapter Ten: Last Words

Summary

Oscar remains in the shadows during each of the four house calls that Callie makes – each one revealing children who were very ill. One girl from the Miller family is unable to eat; a boy in the Collier family says he hurts all over; and another child went to sleep okay, but woke unable to hear or see. At the final house, Lord Baker grabs him by the shoulder and after establishing that he is Caleb's hand, he insists that Oscar tell him he has to come to the City immediately as something is very wrong. Oscar agrees. Callie comes out and asks Oscar to wait outside while she talks to Lord Baker. As she does so, Oscar sits outside knowing he has no business being in the City and wishing Callie had just come and given him symptoms to treat.

Callie returns and tries to explain that Lord Baker had only reacted out of fear for his child and that people sometimes take out their frustration or fear on the person closest to them, particularly if that person is unable to react in kind. He nods, pretending to understand, even when she tells him that he can't promise Master Caleb will come unless he knows for sure because these people will insist that his promises are kept.

Finally, Callie reveals that she brought Oscar out of desperation. So many children were sick and she couldn't find the common thread that linked them. She'd hoped that Oscar might see something that she'd missed. In Oscar's mind, a map builds of the streets they'd gone down, and the houses they'd visited. He sees no pattern immediately, but wonders if the plague had returned and perhaps changed or evolved somehow. Callie quietly comments that the plague was ages gone, but Oscar knows that sometimes treatment of a problem only inspires the problem to adapt itself to work. Oscar has to be sure, so he takes Callie back to Caleb's shop and then down to the library – a place no one had ever been shown before.

Callie is surprised by the cats that all come out to see her without reservation. She gives them all attention while Oscar pulls the plague book down. A small green book comes down with it, and Oscar takes that one as well. Callie begins to read the one concerning the plague while Oscar looks up a variety of the symptoms they'd seen. In the plague book, Callie learns that the Shining City had originally been constructed as a quarantine center for sick people, locked in as soon as symptoms showed. She tells Oscar, adding that the plague started on the coast and swept through the southern villages – villages that no longer existed. Callie opens the green book and discovers that it is a handwritten journal by Master Galen, the last wizard to have written in the Wizard Chronicles. Oscar takes it from her, and reading it learns that the wizard trees were not a monument to their enduring and lasting greatness, but rather a last desperate attempt to infuse the land with magic so that it could defeat the plague. Their sacrifice is described in detail, and signatures of what appears to be a hundred wizards follow. He looks at the map from Aletheia before the plague and one from after and realizes that the Barrow doesn't exist in the original map.



Analysis

Illness continues to be an ongoing theme as Callie and Oscar go to more houses with children that each exhibit different symptoms. Nothing seems to be linked and Oscar wonders whether or not the plague may have returned in a new form. Since the illnesses all seem to affect children, like the original plague had, Oscar compares it in his mind to how some garden pests had managed to overcome the treatment to rid the garden of them, seemingly able to adapt and attack again in time. He believes that may be happening now, foreshadowing an increase in the illnesses and their severity in the near future. The fact that Callie also notices that all of the children appear to be missing something, although she can't put a finger on what, reveals that Oscar is likely on the correct path and that the illnesses are all related.

Oscar remains in the shadows, once again feeling out of place and insecure, wondering why Callie wanted him to come at all. His insecurities are so great that he allows himself to fade until most of his consciousness is elsewhere and only a shell of him remains to wait for Callie to finish.

Lord Baker is introduced and when he recognizes Oscar as Caleb's hand, he elicits a promise from Oscar that he will tell Caleb to come to the City immediately as there is something very wrong happening there. He agrees to do so, but Callie warns him not to make promises he cannot keep simply in an effort to mollify distraught parents. Oscar doesn't understand, but following her earlier instructions, he nods pretending he does.

Information is a necessity, so Oscar takes Callie down to Caleb's library, something no one else has ever seen. She is stunned by the vast array of books. Oscar hands her the plague book and the green one that came out with it.

The cats welcome Callie like she is an old friend, all clustering around her to get attention. Oscar has never seen them behave this way and their friendliness towards Callie symbolizes her good character in his mind, the cats having a sense about such things.

Change is a terrifying theme for Callie and Oscar as they learn about the plague and begin to understand the history of their region. Not only was the City not a place of refuge, it was used as a quarantine to keep sick people from spreading the disease farther; but the Barrow, as they knew it, simply didn't exist in those times. Reading further, Oscar learns that the wizard trees were not created singly over a long period of history, but were instead the result of a colossal sacrifice made by the wizard community as a whole. Their sacrifice was to infuse the soil with their personal magic – the only thing the plague seemed unable to infect – and return it to the soil in an attempt to fight the plague. The wizards describe what happened in Aletheia as their greatest and most monstrous failure. The trees created by their sacrifice were monuments of desperation.



Discussion Question 1

What ailments do Callie and Oscar discover in the City, and in what way do they appear to be linked, if at all?

Discussion Question 2

Where does Oscar take Callie after they leave the City, and what is so unusual about the fact that he takes her there at all?

Discussion Question 3

What does Oscar learn about the wizards and the wizard trees, and what overall impact did what he learns have on the Barrow?

Vocabulary

unperturbed, quarantine, providence, impenetrable, embellished, necessitated



Chapter Eleven: Deciduous Ghosts

Summary

Oscar had believed the legend of the island of Aletheia; that wizards had kept the island prosperous and healthy for generations and eventually the power of the wizards had gone into the wizard trees as a living legacy where they continued to serve to this day. He is stunned to discover it is all a lie. The wizards gave their lives so that the magic of the Barrow would be able to overcome the death and decay of the plague within the City walls, and their sacrifice had not only repaired the City but transformed it. Over time, City people became so dependent on magic that they couldn't live without their growing need for a wide range of petty charms for all occasions. Of course, official history told none of this.

In the morning Oscar rises and takes small comfort in the routine of chores. When he opens the back door he finds a basket of bread with a note from Malcolm to come see him as soon as he can. He opens the shop and immediately begins to sell protection charms of all kinds. Master Christopher reveals that overnight the market was sabotaged and Madame Catherine's goat was missing. Master Thomas and a farmer both come in, and soon after a man and woman ask for Caleb. Oscar tells them he isn't there and has no idea when he'll return. Mistress Eliza reveals that she and her husband Giles make jam, and while picking berries in the northwest area of the woods they'd witnessed the disappearance of several wizard trees. Only the stumps remained. Tears roll down Oscar's cheeks as he absorbs the death of several wizards, feeling their loss acutely. He wonders if it hurt them when they were cut. Eliza reassures him, and asks that he tell Caleb to contact them as soon as he returns.

After they leave, Oscar locks the door and walks to Madame Mariel's. Callie lets him in, telling him another boy, Jasper, is ill. His mother, Lady Foster sits watching anxiously as Callie asks Oscar to look at Jasper. He comments on how scaly the rash is as Callie applies herbs to ease the discomfort. Oscar wonders aloud about the plague, oblivious to the trouble he is causing by increasing Lady Foster's distress. With sudden realization, Oscar then announces that Callie is determined to help because she hadn't been able to heal her own brother and carries that weight. Angry now, Callie asks Oscar to leave so he returns to the shop and considers how it seems that everything he says and does is wrong. It occurs to him it can't be a coincidence that the attacks happen only when Caleb is gone. He wonders if he can find a way to get a message to Caleb to get him to return. Convincing himself Caleb will be glad; he goes into the workroom – an action forbidden under any circumstances. His skin crawls as he looks around carefully. Then he spots the trapdoor and opens it.

Inside he finds a wooden figure of a small child and picks it up. The wood hums, feeling warm like the cat he'd carved, and called to him somehow. Holding it, he feels just like he does around the wizard trees. Passages about living enchantments from 'Magic and



the Mind' come to him, followed by Caleb's voice telling him what an odd little boy he is. Suddenly the truth comes to him. He is made of wood.

Analysis

History is the first theme as the legend of Aletheia is unraveled when Oscar learns the truth. The wizards had performed the greatest spell of all time, saving those who remained by giving their own lives to eradicate the plague that was consuming everything. The legend was a lie, and learning the truth sends Oscar into a tailspin. The Duke, with all of his faith in magic, had allowed three quarters of the island to die. Had the wizards not acted, all would have been lost so they sacrificed themselves, circling the hill and remaining until the spell they cast rooted them in place. This not only swept the region clear of disease, but also created in its wake the jewel that Asteri became. Plague survivors were drawn to the region in droves and even the Duke made the City his home. The history books made no references to the sacrifice made by the wizards, but say merely that magic eventually overcame, saving the 'chosen' people just as they'd believed.

Magic is ongoing as a theme throughout, and in this segment as well. Oscar remembers how Malcolm had tried to prepare him for the fact that while magic is beautiful, it can also be terrible. Despite the sacrifice made by the wizards to save Aletheia, the people who remained had learned little. They still came into the shop seeking protection items at the first signs of trouble rather than seek out the source and repair or eradicate it.

Master Christopher warns Oscar to protect the shop while he can, foreshadowing the likelihood that something disastrous will occur before Caleb has a chance to return. The destruction of magical items around the marketplace supports his suspicions that Caleb's shop may be a target. While Barrow residents come in seeking protection spells, City residents seem oblivious to the danger and gravitate more to the gaming and entertainment shelves.

Destruction continues to be a theme as Oscar learns that several of the wizard trees in the northwest strip of forest have been cut down. Only the stumps remained, Oscar is informed and his blood runs cold as he realizes that each tree cut down represented the life of a wizard lost for all time now.

Illnesses continue to plague the children of the City, despite the fact that they aren't supposed to be able to get sick. Callie is increasingly distressed that she is unable to help the children who are brought to her, and she asks Oscar for help.

Social skills are not Oscar's forte, but honesty is. While others may couch their comments in platitudes or empty assurances, Oscar is more apt to simply reveal what he sees or thinks at any given moment. This social ineptitude has Callie sending Oscar away after he discusses the plague in front of Lady Foster who brought her son Jasper to Callie for help.



Loyalty is an ongoing theme as Oscar tries to balance his loyalties to Caleb with the events that are occurring in his absence. He convinces himself that he must get a message to Caleb, and breaks a cardinal rule by going into Caleb's workshop to see if he can figure out a way to contact his master. He tells himself that Caleb will be grateful that he has done so.

Creation is the final theme of this segment as Oscar discovers yet another truth that unravels the edges of his mind. Lifting a trapdoor in Caleb's workshop, he finds a partially completed wooden child with articulated arms and legs. Holding the childlike doll in his arms, he feels the same warmth as he did from the wizard trees and it occurs to him that this doll explains why he is so odd. It is clear to him now that Caleb made him out of wood as well, and then used a spell to breathe life into his wooden form so that he could have help around the shop.

Discussion Question 1

What happens overnight to the Barrow marketplace, and how does magic tie these events together?

Discussion Question 2

What does Mistress Eliza tell Oscar that turns his world upside-down, and why does the young boy in the shop find his reaction amusing?

Discussion Question 3

What does Oscar do that upsets Callie and how does she respond?

Vocabulary

prosperous, purveyors, gluttonous, surreptitiously, figuratively, ineffable



Chapter Twelve: The Magicians

Summary

Oscar's life finally makes sense to him in a horrible kind of way. He holds his brother for a while, and then lays the wooden boy carefully back where he found him. The comments made by so many people ring in his ears; and he realizes that this explains why he couldn't remember his past or his time in the Home. He may never have been there at all. Now it makes sense to him that he feels more at home with the trees than with people. They are his family.

Finally, the roaring in his ears subsides and he gets up and does his chores; restocking and dusting – things he was made to do. Callie arrives, but he doesn't understand her expression. She asks if he has anything to say, but when he remains silent, she tells him that he should think about what he says and how people might feel about them. Also, if he upsets people, he should tell them that he's sorry. Oscar tells her he is, but he has no intention of visiting any more sick people. His responsibility is the shop. There is nothing she can do to help him, he tells her and Callie goes from upset to angry. She tells him that she received word the day before that her brother had died and telling Oscar that he'd been her only friend, she leaves brokenhearted.

Instead of opening the shop, Caleb goes to Malcolm's bakery. The shop is closed and there are no baked goods on display. Seeing Caleb's face, Malcolm asks what is wrong and Caleb tells him about the gardens; the glass house; the missing goat; the cloth and leather damaged; and there are sick children in the City. He adds that five of the wizard trees have been cut down and were hidden by an illusion spell. He blurts out the truth of their sacrifice and Malcolm is glad that he knows. Oscar asks Malcolm what the wood would be used for and Malcolm can't imagine anything more powerful. Oscar tells Malcolm that he hurt Callie's feelings and adds that he just doesn't understand how to act or talk with people. He asks Malcolm to help, but Malcolm admits that he is leaving, and offers to take Oscar with him as a baker's apprentice but Oscar says he can't leave even after Malcolm adds that there is room for the cats and for Callie. Malcolm doesn't understand, but Oscar is tied to the forest. Malcolm promises to leave instructions as to how to reach him just in case Oscar ever changes his mind.

When he returns to the shop, he finds the lights on and the front door open. Master Caleb is furious that the shop was closed and can't believe how little money is in the cash box. Oscar mentions the wizard trees, telling Caleb his illusion spell failed. Caleb is fuming, but Oscar insists that he killed the wizards, but Caleb says there aren't any. They left and now it was up to him to serve the City and shepherd the magic. He tells Oscar that he should turn him out for his disrespect. Then he slaps Oscar hard across the face and tells him to return to the cellar saying he'll find a new apprentice and Oscar can remain in the cellar. Oscar asks why he did it and Caleb tells him there was a need, but it was obvious he wasn't concerned at all. Oscar goes down stairs knowing he should be glad that his position is clear again, but the gardens were damaged and the



glass house destroyed. Eventually, things would run out. He is cleaning up and contemplating the future when the wall crashes in.

Analysis

Self-awareness is something Oscar appears to have gained when he finds the half-finished boy made of wood in Caleb's workshop. He thinks about all of the times he's felt like he didn't fit, or when he didn't realize he'd behaved wrong and suddenly so many things make sense to him. He didn't fit because he wasn't one of them. He was a hand. An enchanted piece of wood created to serve. It explains why he struggles to relate to other people. He isn't human. That also explains why he is unable to remember his past. He didn't have one. The reality of it all crashes in on him.

Routine and order is what Oscar needs to feel normal, but when he goes up to stock shelves and dust, Callie knocks on the door. The theme of expressions is ongoing and Oscar notices a new one on Callie. Upset with him, and upset by the news of her brother's death, Callie's eyes are red from crying and she is almost ghost-like. Oscar has no idea what this expression means, but he understands that humans just innately know what the expressions on other people mean.

Behavior is also an ongoing theme as Callie continues to try to mold and shape Oscar's behavior around other people. She arrives at the shop upset and wants Oscar to understand that his behavior around her patients was upsetting and wrong as was her comments to him. Oscar digs in telling her there won't be a next time with patients. Now it's Callie who doesn't understand Oscar's behavior. She asks if he's mad, but he isn't.

Belief is a strong theme in this chapter as Oscar now wholeheartedly believes that he is a wooden creation of Master Caleb's, created solely with the purpose of becoming his hand. This belief hamstringing his ability to progress with Callie, and he immediately gives up on any effort at learning how to fit in because he's convinced himself that it simply isn't possible. He can't possibly belong because he isn't human. He's just different. He retreats into that core belief and hides there, using it as the reason for giving up on himself.

Fear is an ongoing theme also as Caleb goes to Malcolm's rather than opening the shop, needing to talk to someone about the myriad of things going wrong. He learns that Malcolm is leaving and when Malcolm offers to take him along, his fear of anything but the task he was made for rises up and leaves him unable to accept despite Malcolm reassuring him that he could bring the cats and Callie, foreshadowing information not yet revealed regarding Madame Mariel's plans.

Confession is strong in Oscar as he tells Malcolm all of it beginning with the gardens and the glass house; the damages done in the marketplace; the goat missing; the sick children in the city and finally he mentions the wizard trees. He blurts out that they'd sacrificed themselves and Malcolm is pleased with his awareness. Finally, he tells Malcolm about his fight with Callie.



Anger is a theme that Callie begins when she talks to Oscar but Caleb's anger is palpable. He'd never displayed this kind of anger with Oscar before so this display by Caleb is a shock. Caleb is so angry that he does something he's never done before – he slaps Oscar hard across the face. When Oscar questions Caleb about the wizard trees, he asks Oscar what he did, as though this is somehow his fault as well. Caleb seems to be clueless as to the truth of the wizard trees which is all but sacrilege to Oscar who reminds Caleb that they gave themselves to save the City. Again, Caleb argues. Caleb doesn't see the truth.

Responsibility is an ongoing theme as Oscar was entrusted to be responsible for the shop and for ensuring that everything went smoothly while Caleb was gone. Caleb feels the weight of his responsibilities as well, telling Oscar that the wizards abandoned the area leaving him to keep magic alive. He considers it his job to ensure that misfortune, disease, want, vulnerability and hunger don't affect the residents of Aletheia. His response clearly foreshadows an end to those responsibilities.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Oscar tell Callie that he doesn't want her to come around anymore, and how did the wooden boy he finds in Caleb's workshop affect this decision?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Malcolm unwilling or unable to help Oscar and the residents of Aletheia, and what other option does he propose to Oscar?

Discussion Question 3

What does Oscar accuse Caleb of, and what is flawed about the reason or excuse Caleb gives Oscar for his actions?

Vocabulary

articulated, accumulated, vulnerability, delusions, appraised



Chapter Thirteen: Dirt

Summary

The front end of the shop explodes inward and Oscar can hardly believe what he sees as the lumbering collection of dirt, sticks, fungi and decomposition rumbles into the shop. It sweeps vials and tinctures off the shelves, shoving them into the maw that is its mouth, glass and all. Then it continues, devouring teas, enchantments, jewels and potions. Oscar can see the rocks of its teeth as another hissing beast appears, and Oscar is surprised when Cat growls and hisses, backing the lumbering creature up. Cat attacks, and Oscar tries to stop him as Bear and Crow join the attack. Oscar begins throwing love potions at the monster. It kicks and flails at Crow and Cat who comes around to attack a second time. Caleb appears in the doorway with Pebble and Map at his side, swinging a glowing battle flail. The creature roars, and focuses its attention on Caleb who shouts at Oscar to run, but Oscar is frozen.

Caleb and the cats attack again and again as soil sprays the air around them and the monster howls. The monster swings and hits Caleb in the head so hard that it snaps back making a sound that is unearthly. A loud, unnatural crack is the last sound Oscar hears before Caleb crumples to the ground. Oscar calls out to Caleb, but there is no movement as the monster looms over him. Crow is on its back and the monster sends him flying just as Oscar launches himself at it. It flings Oscar so hard he finds himself lying on the path outside. He manages to get up determined to find help, screaming and banging on doors. The blacksmith hands out swords and axes, giving Oscar a knife and telling him to hide in his shop. Though Oscar dearly wants to, he creeps forward instead until he is looking into the shop at the chaos within. Caleb lies in the same position, eyes staring sightless, body broken. He resists attempts to take him outside again, getting to his knees in front of his master. He owed Caleb his life. Oscar allows them to take Caleb's body away, and they all agree to return the following day to help him clean up.

Bear stumbles in after everyone is gone, her fur dirty and clumps hanging. Oscar finds Cat pinned under debris, two legs broken, but he yowls and looks behind him where Crow is lying, shivering. Oscar gives them both Valerian roots in milk to help with pain, letting both Crow and Cat lick the liquid from his fingers. Then he tends to them both, setting legs and cleaning and bandaging wounds with chamomile and witch hazel. Then he carries them carefully down to his bed. Pebble and Map are both dirty but okay. He puts Block on the table to watch them and then tells them about Master Caleb, promising them that they needn't be scared because he would look after them.

Analysis

Chaos is the initial theme in this chapter as Oscar is on the front lines of the attack as the monster bursts through the wall of the shop. It looks like nothing he has ever seen



before, and Oscar notices it is shaped like a person but much larger and made from dirt and debris. In moments it manages to ravage the shop and then begins to study Oscar, despite the fact that it has no face. The cats attack and the beast actually backs up, sweeping them away at every opportunity. Oscar is running out of things to throw at it when Caleb arrives and distracts the beast.

The monster is a conglomeration of dirt, sticks, stones and moss. The components suggest a connection to the forest - perhaps to the wizard trees themselves, foreshadowing an ongoing problem rather than an anomaly or a one of a kind occurrence.

Bravery is a theme that applies to cats and people alike as they all battle the beast in an effort to chase it off or destroy it. Oscar's bravery comes on the heels of terror, which roots him to the spot at first. Caleb continues to attack, telling Oscar to run, but the monster manages to swat Caleb so hard that his neck breaks.

Death is also a theme as Caleb distracts the monster so that Oscar can get away, and pays with his life when the monster breaks his neck. This is the first contact with death that Oscar can remember, and so far all he can think to do is to stay and continue the chores he was made to do.

Community is also a theme as Oscar calls on the people in the market place to help, banging on doors and waking the shop owners up. To his surprise, they all answer his calls, coming to his aid and giving him a sense of belonging that he hadn't felt to this point. They try to shelter him from Caleb, but Oscar already knows that he is gone, and what remains is just a shell. Oscar is offered a place to stay as well, but all he wants to do is stay where he is familiar and feels at home.

Sense of responsibility is strong in Oscar as he immediately searches for the cats. Injuries and anxieties are calmed as Oscar tends to them, setting legs and bandaging injuries. He promises to take care of them, knowing he is responsible for them now and they depend on him. He feels that he owes Caleb a great deal, despite the mistakes he knows the man made, and he isn't sure how he should feel beyond that. Mostly, he is overwhelmed but since the cats are dependent on him now, he tells them everything will be fine, even though he has no idea how.

Discussion Question 1

What does the monster appear to want most and what is the extent of the damage done by it by the time it is finished?

Discussion Question 2

How do the other shop owners respond when Oscar pounds on their doors for help and what offers are made to Oscar?



Discussion Question 3

What injuries do the cats suffer; how does Oscar treat them and what promises does he make?

Vocabulary

suffocated, decomposing, flail, reverberating, rampage



Chapter Fourteen: Shells

Summary

Oscar gets up in the morning and feeds the cats downstairs. Then he goes up and begins cleaning up, trying hard not to remember anything. Madame Catherine and Master Thomas arrive, and promise a carpenter will be by to replace the wall soon. Then, crouching in front of him so that they are at eye level with each other, Master Thomas asks him what happened. He closes his eyes and begins to tell them about the monster, answering their questions as well as he can. After hearing his account, they promise to apply all of their resources to finding the creature and destroying it along with whomever or whatever created it.

Callie arrives after they leave, and stunned at the damage she asks if he is alright. They she picks up a broom and begins to help him clean up, still wondering why there is so much dirt in the shop. Oscar is surprised that she isn't angry with him anymore and accepts her help gratefully. People stop by to look in now and then, but Callie glares at them until they leave. By the end of the day, the shop looks clean but barren. Many shelves are broken or gone and those that remain are empty. Finally, Callie announces it is time to eat. She pulls out vegetables and begins chopping, but Oscar informs her that all he eats is bread, with cheese occasionally. She insists they have to restock the pantry and asks if Caleb had any gold set aside. Oscar tells her that there is probably plenty.

Callie offers to let Oscar stay at the healer's shop until Madame Mariel returns suggesting that he could help her with the children who are sick, but Oscar has a home, and insists he has to stay. It is his home. Finally, she asks him what happened. He tells her, and then asks how he should feel now that his master is gone, particularly if they'd done something bad. Callie insists that he tell her, so he does. Callie is stunned to discover the truth, and can't understand why Caleb would cut down any of the wizard trees. Oscar explains that the wood is powerful, and puts Block in her hand. At first Callie thinks Caleb cut down the trees to make figurines, but Oscar takes her downstairs and shows her the partially made boy in the floor. He tells her that Caleb intended to transform the boy into something almost real and explains that Caleb made him. She struggles to absorb what he is saying as the seconds tick past and finally she tells him she doesn't care, even if it is true. She tells him that he may have begun that way, but now he is Oscar. She puts the wooden boy back in his place and Oscar tells her he is sorry about her brother.

Analysis

Routine is what Oscar falls back on once again, hoping that by doing what is normal, he can force his life into a rhythm of normalcy. He realizes that he will have to adapt his



routine to some degree, accommodating the cats downstairs for the first time with food and water, and then cleaning up the disaster zone left behind in the shop.

Community is a theme also as shop keepers lend their aid, and question him about the monster, promising that they will put an end to both the monster and whoever created it. Their promises give Oscar a sense of relief that it is under control and someone is finally doing something.

Feelings and emotional responses are ongoing as a theme – Oscar trying to work out how he should feel about his master's death. He asks Callie, who suggests that she might feel scared, or sad. Oscar isn't sure because his feelings are tangled up with Caleb's destruction of the wizard trees – a sacrifice he doesn't understand. When he tells Callie the truth, she feels it like a slap as well, proving that Oscar's grasp on emotions is not as far from human as he might think.

Creation returns as a theme revealed for the first time when Oscar discovers the half completed boy in Caleb's workshop, and now again as Oscar takes Callie downstairs to show her what Caleb had been doing with the wizard trees he was cutting down. When she sees it, he can't tell how she feels about it; whether she sees something repellent or beautiful. She holds it like she would a child as Oscar continues his explanation.

Family and a sense of loss are acute in Oscar as he considers the boy in the floor. He thinks about how he could have taught him things and how he could have made his adjustment to the human world easier to navigate. With Caleb gone, that is no longer in the realm of possibilities, and it saddens him how close he came to having a brother like himself; someone who would understand the challenges integrating with the human world. Now instead, what would have been his brother is just a shell. Oscar finally understands the depths of Callie's loss when she learned her brother was dead.

Friendship is a strong theme as Oscar reveals his greatest truth to Callie and almost sags with relief when she doesn't reject him. In fact, after he tells her he began his life as wizard wood, she is insistent that she doesn't care. Now, he is Oscar, she tells him.

Discussion Question 1

What offer does Callie make Oscar after she spends the day helping him clean up and what is his response?

Discussion Question 2

What secret does Oscar finally reveal to Callie and how does she feel once she knows the truth?



Discussion Question 3

What loss does Oscar understand now more acutely and why?

Vocabulary

recoiled, impeccable, unfurls, abandoned, contraptions, abomination



Chapter Fifteen: Bait

Summary

Four shops are closed in the marketplace when Oscar goes out the next morning. He heads into the woods to collect what he can, planning to prepare what he picks in the afternoon. He catches himself thinking maybe Caleb will be back by then, but then he remembers and his master is still dead. Trying to clear his mind, he puts himself to his tasks, collecting mushrooms, flowers, plants and bark.

The missing wall makes keeping customers out difficult, so Oscar opts to work upstairs instead. A gentleman comes in looking for a necklace that will help his mate forgive a sin if he gave it to her, but Oscar has nothing of the sort. He has no rings either, he assures the man and suggests he apologize, but he opts to go to the perfumer instead. Customers talk to him throughout the day and bring him food. He learns that Master Christopher's tavern was attacked; the jeweler had all his enchanted jewels taken and the shoemaker's shop had been hit as well. Meanwhile, the magic smiths search the forest for the creature, but find no sign. A trap had been set using all of the magic available but most in Barrow wonder if it will be enough and the City residents are oblivious to it all.

A man from the City looks around and asks what happened. Oscar tells him but he brushes the incident off and asks for Oscar's best luck charm. Oscar tells him he has none – that the monster had eaten them all. Oscar apologizes but the gentleman is livid and promises the duke will be made aware of the situation. Eventually, carpenter Madame Sabine arrives with a wall of special wood but hasn't had time to put a door in as yet so the shop is very closed in.

Callie checks on him and asks if he's had any word about the magic smiths. Callie jokes about what some of the masters might have to contribute and to her surprise, Oscar joins in. Oscar thinks about the magical items available and realizes that all they have to offer are small enchantments. Callie tells him that Ronald is getting worse, now speaking as though he is slowing down. She has no idea how to help everyone. Oscar suggests she make a map of her clients and their illnesses.

Master Thomas arrives next and insists that he needs to know if Oscar was honest with them. When Oscar insists he was, Master Thomas admits they caught a large bear and asks Oscar to think again. He realizes that Master Thomas is accusing him of lying, and filled with anger, he goes to talk to Callie. When he gets there, he discovers Lord Cooper is there. Hugo is not the patient this time however, his sister Sophie is. After concentrating on her map for minutes, Callie finally realizes the truth. Oscar isn't made of wood, the City children are, and the magic that made them is failing.



Analysis

Fear is an ongoing theme that begins this chapter when Oscar goes out in the morning to get supplies. The marketplace is empty; and shops are closed.

Dependency is also an early and ongoing theme as a City gentleman comes in seeking a charm that will help make the person he gives it to forgive him his sins. Oscar obviously sees the shallow side of this kind of charm as he suggests that the gentleman try apologizing. As it is with many dependencies, the gentleman opts to seek out someone else to provide him the charm he needs. Another gentleman wants a luck charm to ensure his business meeting goes well that evening, and he becomes angry when Oscar informs him that there aren't any. He strongly suggests that the marketplace correct whatever issues it is having and return to order. Then he threatens to inform the duke himself.

Neighbors reveal themselves to be more caring than Oscar would have believed when they sympathetically bring food items when they stop in to see if he is okay, and to offer lodgings and support if he needs them. Oscar is surprised by the shows of generosity and Callie reminds him that sometimes people can be kind.

Humanness is also a theme as Callie assures Oscar that he is not the wooden child, but that the City children all were. Despite his emotional miscues at times, Oscar is still a real boy while the children of the City were all failing because they were not. Oscar proves his humanness when he jokes with Callie about how some of the magic smiths were ill equipped to fight a monster of any kind. Master Julian, the stylist, could give it a poor haircut or the perfumer, Master Charles, might attack by scent. The jokes aren't especially good, but Callie is surprised that Oscar makes one at all but Oscar frequently jokes – he just doesn't share them.

Integrity is a theme as Oscar's is questioned by Master Thomas after a bear is caught in the trap set by the magic smiths. Oscar experiences anger for the first time as well when Master Thomas makes his feelings about Oscar's account clear, telling Oscar that he wants him to think carefully, as though he might remember the truth if he did.

Emotions and how to control them are also an ongoing theme for Oscar as he learns to interact with others. Angry after his experience with Master Thomas, Oscar goes to Callie hoping to talk to her about it, but one look at her face tells him that something is very wrong as she tells him she is with a patient. Oscar remembers their last encounter in front of a patient when he spoke without thinking, so this time he controls his mouth as Callie works with Hugo's sister Sophie, now sick as well. To keep control of himself, he counts, and continues to count until it is clear that she is ready to talk to him.

Assault on all magic continues. Not only were all the enchanted jewels stolen and shelves broken; and Master Christopher's special brew taken, but after studying her map of the illnesses of the City children, Callie can clearly see that they are failing. It seems that anything connected with magic is and had been since the wizard tree



stumps began revealing themselves. Now, without Caleb to reinforce the spells, magic was unraveling.

Discussion Question 1

What is a small enchantment and what are examples of how small enchantments would compare to real magic?

Discussion Question 2

What is the final clue that tells Callie that her patients are not sick, but failing instead and what examples does she back that up with?

Discussion Question 3

What emotion does Oscar learn first-hand; who inspires it, and how?

Vocabulary

pantaloons, desolate, amplification, haberdashery, extraordinary



Chapter Sixteen – Decoctions

Summary

Callie talks to Oscar about her theory where the City children are concerned, and though he tries to argue with her, the evidence she presents is compelling. She tells Oscar to consider how many children could have been made with five wizard trees and how much money Caleb could have made by making them.

As Callie continues to posit and back up her theory, Oscar suddenly sees the truth of it and realizes that there is a hole in the Barrow magic. Five trees missing had created a hole in the Barrow earth, and because of that there was a hole in the protection they provided. Callie asks him if they can fix it somehow. He thinks they might be able to do something.

Lord Cooper and his carriage driver come in suddenly saying a beast of some kind had attacked their carriage. Sophie and the driver, Pierre, are both hurt. Callie begins with Sophie, cutting off her dress so she can properly dress her wounds. Lord Cooper tells them the story of their attack. Callie asks Oscar to create something, seeing that the wound is more than she is able to deal with. He knows what she wants immediately, and goes to Caleb's shop.

Oscar had never made a strengthening spell but he knew that some things only worked when they were paired with others, and other times you had to coax herbs to be stronger than they were alone. He considers what he needs to do: repair, amplify, and bind, and he knew he needed dandelion, vetiver and goldenseal. Somehow, he needs to blend them to create something new. He grabs two handfuls of each herb and mixes it with a bag of cornmeal and water. When the decoction is ready, he hurries back to the healer's.

Oscar's eyes meet Sophie's and he is drawn to her. He leans forward, knowing somehow that she had something to say and she whispers one word – Monster. He knows what she is asking, and spends the night pacing the cellar and thinking about it. He considers all of the things the monster had attacked, and his behavior while doing so and finally realizes that there is no competing wizard. The monster is simply hungry for magic.

Oscar begins by creating a tea and a salve for Callie to take to the City children the next day. By morning, Oscar is ready. He writes a note for Callie, telling her he had to collect plants and would be gone for the day but that she should give each child both the tea and the salve. He adds his request that she look after the cats for him. Finally, he gives food and water to the cats and puts the note in the sack for Callie. He is ready to go.



Analysis

Humanness is the topic of conversation and the opening theme in this chapter as Callie continues to provide facts to back up her theory that the City children weren't actually sick, but were failing or more accurately, the magic that created them was failing. Oscar argues that regardless of the children, he believes he is a creation of Caleb's as well, but Callie is adamant that he is different. She reminds him of the trip they made to the City when she told him that she felt something was missing in all of the children – something she couldn't put a name to. The missing element is the soul.

Magic is a secondary theme as Oscar considers all that he's learned and tries to understand not only how the magic is failing, but what to do about it. The monster continues to seek out magic meanwhile, and the most recent attack is on Lord Cooper's carriage.

Pierre, Lord Cooper's carriage driver is introduced when they return to the healer's after their carriage is attacked. He is also injured, but defers treatment so that Callie can look after Sophie whose injuries are more severe.

Decoctions and how they are made are the main theme in this chapter. Oscar is tasked with making something that will repair, amplify and bind the magic in the City children. He considers how some herbs or mixtures were unstable and needed something else to ensure they wouldn't rupture. Other herbs need to be stronger and require a boosting agent to be effective. To begin with Oscar makes a poultice for Sophie using goldenseal; vetiver; and dandelion mixed with cornmeal. The ingredients are the kinds of invisible ingredients that help other things work the way they should but Oscar hopes that by combining them he will create something else entirely.

Responsibility is a theme as well, put on Oscar by Sophie when she whispers 'monster' to him after they were attacked. He knows that she wants him to do something to get rid of it and her fear is genuine. If City children are made of magic, the monster would target them directly, and in Sophie's case it had.

Oscar is determined to deal with the monster so that it doesn't return, foreshadowing an epic battle to regain control of the failing Barrow magic.

Discussion Question 1

How does Callie convince Oscar that he is real but the City children are made of wood?

Discussion Question 2

What remedy does Oscar create for Sophie and how does he make it?



Discussion Question 3

What does Oscar realize about the monster and how might it help him in dealing with the monster?

Vocabulary

digestion, circulation, faltered, inherently, transformation, eternity



Chapter Seventeen: The Hole

Summary

Oscar left the huge bag filled with every liquid and powder that he could find in Caleb's shop outside the back entrance, along with one of Caleb's special animal traps. Oscar reasoned that if the soil was hungry and wanted magic, all he had to do was feed it. It is a long way to the northwest strip, and not much to see between the Barrow and the sea beyond the barren plague lands.

He notices as he walks that the wizard trees seem to have aged centuries in the past few months, and Oscar realizes that the gnawing feeling in him is sadness. He walks for a long time and his body complains with the effort. Finally he sees a stretch of open sky and a hole in the forest. He wills himself to go closer, feeling cold and crushing emptiness. The first stump he approaches comes up to his knees, covered with moss. The sun shines on the undergrowth, shocking the life there.

Oscar is exhausted, but can't stop. He begins by setting the trap as a precaution, wrapping the chain around the largest oak tree in the area. He hides the trap with leaves and hangs the sack filled with liquids and powders from a branch above it. Then he opens a jar of arrowroot, rue and something else and spreads it around the nearest stump. He hears the word 'more' and looks around but the word just seemed to exist. He opens another jar and pours it out, getting the same response. He keeps opening and dumping containers soon covered in them himself until the bag is empty but still he feels the desire it has for more. All that remains is the bag over the trap that he'd hung for the monster and then he feels its presence. A rotting, dark form rises out of the ground and takes shape as Oscar watches. Frozen in one spot, he can hardly breathe as it goes for the bait and steps right on the trap. It moans and begins crawling forward and then stands, half of its leg missing on one side. It digs down into the earth and begins to form a replacement, and then Oscar runs as fast as he can. He can hear it thudding behind him and wills himself to go faster. He reaches the end of the forest and keeps going not the plaguelands. Suddenly Oscar is aware that he can no longer feel magic, but there is an overall emptiness as well. The area felt dead.

Oscar turns and the monster is standing near the edge of the forest. He realizes that he is covered in magic and for a minute he wills the monster to go back, but he knows that won't solve anything so he throws a rock at it, and then another. Then he runs, and it follows about twenty paces behind him. Slowly the plaguelands reduce the magic monster, but not fast enough. He runs until he sees something he'd never seen before – the sea. Then Oscar looks back at the monster and with nowhere else to go, he runs into the waves. He stands in the water, the spray in his face. A portion of an old dock remains and Oscar clings to it willing the monster to come for him. It comes in after him, darkness spreading out as it goes in deeper until it throws himself towards Oscar and falls face-first into the water. The waves consume the monster washing it away. Oscar



hangs on half expected the monster to reemerge, but it doesn't. Oscar has nothing left and the water holds him firm.

Analysis

Courage is the first theme as Oscar takes it upon himself to deal with the monster, gathering all of the magic ingredients he can find in an effort to feed the monster until it is no longer hungry. He has to walk a long way, and go into regions that he has never been exposed to. Despite his fear, he walks further and further finally reaching the wizard trees that had been cut down. Courage is the spark that flickers and then flares with strength when Oscar is forced to lead the monster away from the place and the people he knows. When at first the monster is reluctant to follow, Oscar hurls rocks at it and yells to encourage it to chase him. Oscar's courage continues as he runs through the plaguelands and is confronted with his next obstacle – the sea.

Sadness is also a theme as Oscar reaches the now dead trees and for the first time feels sorrow for the trees themselves and for the wizards now lost for all time because Caleb didn't understand the depth of the sacrifice made by the wizards before him. He was convinced that they had deserted the area, rather than giving everything they had to save it.

Emptiness is what Oscar discovers when he arrives, the missing canopy from the trees leaving a gaping hole in magic and feeling like a hole in the world itself. The remaining trees stretch out but not enough to protect the undergrowth from the brutality of the sun, and the missing canopy contributes to the silence made because there is no place for the birds, or forest creatures that enjoyed its protection. This is a good metaphor for our current forest industry, and makes the observation that despite replanting done to replace what is cut the canopy that sheltered the life beneath the trees cannot survive their removal. The emptiness described accurately depicts a forest after harvesting has occurred.

Fear is a strong theme as Oscar delivers the magical potions and powders, spreading them around the stumps that are all that remain of the damaged trees. The soil yearns for more; more than Oscar has, and when the monster comes for him, the fear roots him to the spot as surely as the trees were rooted. He can only stare as the monster is lured to him by the magic spilled over him while he spread it around.

Hunger is also a theme that encompasses the loss of magic in the area. The damaged area all but cries with hunger, and Oscar can feel the yearning for more magic even after he's given all that he has.

Change is a strong theme as well. Oscar leaves the safety of the forest, running through the plaguelands in an effort to lead the monster further away from Barrow. The changes continue for Oscar as he crosses the plaguelands and sees the sea for the first time. Oscar has never been near the sea before and the author uses a simile to describe how



Oscar sees it saying the waves look like hungry beasts grasping at the land and describing the sea as monstrously alive.

The monster and the sea are further compared when the monster leaps forward, hurtling itself at Oscar and the waves 'lapped and goaded and hungered and consumed' it.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Oscar choose to go after the monster on his own, and what plan is he hoping will work?

Discussion Question 2

How does the monster escape the trap Oscar sets, and what does Oscar realize at that time?

Discussion Question 3

How are the monster and the sea similar in Oscar's mind, and how does he use one against the other?

Vocabulary

encroaching, insatiable, infiltrating, emanated, desiccated, diminishing



Chapter Eighteen: The Land Remembers

Summary

A man pulls Oscar out of the water. Callie hadn't believed where he was going. Sophie had slept on Callie's cot and then next morning Lord Cooper is so filled with gratitude that when Callie asks for his assistance, he doesn't hesitate. He and his driver find the place where Oscar set the trap and follow the boot prints all the way to the water's edge where two boots stand alone. Oscar learns all of this after he is put in a cot with a blanket and tea, and has a long sleep. He is vaguely aware of Pebble's small warm body purring next to him. He relives flashes of running, dust, water, heart pounding, monsters and traps. He remembers the monster walking into the sea, its hunger so large that nothing else mattered. Then he realizes they aren't done. The hole in magic still exists and because the ground is still hungry, monsters will continue to come. Oscar gets up and Callie enters, surprised that he is not only awake but up and dressed. She asks how he is and when he assures her he is fine, she stomps on his foot. Angrily she tells him he could have been killed. After scolding him further, he stops trying to make excuses and apologizes. She insists he tell her if he plans to do anything like that again and then offers him tea and stew. He is about to refuse but a look on her face changes his mind.

Callie tells him how brave he is, and how grateful Lord Cooper is because whatever he created for her worked. Oscar can't help but smile. She tells him she still has to deliver the medication to the other children, and asks him how they can find the ones they don't know about yet. Then she tells Oscar that she's heard from Madame Mariel who informed Callie that she has no plans to return. She plans to stay on the continent because the Barrow is no longer safe. She doesn't add that there is no duke to pay taxes to there, but Callie knows that also played a part in her decision. She asked Callie to sell everything and mail her the proceeds, but Callie says she isn't going to.

Lord Cooper arrives before she can answer and he informs them that both Hugo and Sophie are doing much better, so he'd come to check on Oscar. As he is getting ready to leave, Oscar asks him why he decided to get magic children. He takes a deep breath and then admits that Caleb had promised them children who would never suffer; never get sick or have any problems. They could get whatever they wanted, with no risk of loss and no suffering. Oscar disagrees, and Callie points out wooden children will never grow, but Lord Cooper is convinced that the City would endure as it always had. She asks if he knows how many children there are, and he estimates fifty or more, telling them everyone has them. Suddenly Oscar remembers the ledger he'd seen in Caleb's office, and realizes that the numbers beside them represented the money he'd charged.

Lord Cooper admits that when he'd first seen Oscar, he'd thought Oscar was like his children – an earlier attempt perhaps, and Callie thanks him stiffly and tells him he can go. Callie and Oscar discuss the number of children needing to be cured; and what things were like during the plague. She tells him about her brother, and how he'd grown



from a baby into a boy while she watched. She knows that despite having children that should never get sick, the parents with magical children still lose as they will never have real children who will grow up and have children of their own. Oscar worries that they can't keep the children's magic going forever. Finally, he tells her that he has something very stupid that he has to do, and asks if she will help.

Analysis

Gratitude is the first theme in this chapter as Lord Cooper expresses how grateful he is that Oscar and Callie managed to cure his children. His gratitude is so great that Callie feels confident in asking a favor of him. Knowing where Oscar has gone, she sends Lord Cooper to find him.

Anger is also a theme as Callie berates Oscar for taking such risks on his own. She doesn't understand why he would do such a thing, and is furious that he would take a chance with his life that may have taken him from her forever. Ironically, when Oscar first wakes and sees her, he can't help but wonder what he would have done had the sea taken her away from him. Callie makes him promise not to take such a chance alone again.

Emotions are an ongoing theme throughout this story as Oscar learns more about not only how others feel, but what his own emotions are. When Callie tells him his cure worked on Sophie, he feels lightness in his chest – one that makes him want to smile. Happiness is foreign to him, but Callie's friendship brings out the joy he'd never known before now.

Accountability is also a theme as Oscar asks Lord Cooper why he got himself magic children. Lord Cooper is somewhat taken aback by the question, unfamiliar with having to account for himself or his actions, but since Oscar and Callie saved his 'children' he feels an obligation to them. He tells them that Caleb had promised them children that would never get sick; would never die or suffer like real children did. Oscar reminds him that they have suffered and continue to suffer now, but he insists that wasn't supposed to happen. It never occurred to Lord Cooper that they might fail one day.

Comfort is an emotion that Oscar is still unaccustomed to, but he tries to comfort Callie when she defends the life of real children even if they died young, insisting that didn't mean they shouldn't have been born at all. He reaches out and touches her arm gently before pulling away – a milestone for him.

Revelations in this chapter include the information that there are more than fifty children who are made from wizard wood living in the City and everyone has them according to Lord Cooper. Oscar is speechless when Lord Cooper explained that once one child had been manufactured and presented as flawless, no one else wanted to have children that were less than perfect in any way as it would be a disadvantage from the beginning. Lord Cooper also reveals that he'd thought Oscar was an earlier attempt by Caleb, and admitting it aloud now has Callie all but throwing him out the front door. When Lord



Cooper tells Oscar and Callie that everyone has magic children, Callie asks about future generations – something impossible under current conditions, but Lord Cooper doesn't want to think beyond right now, and he simply insists that the City will take care of them.

Souls are discussed as the indefinable something that exists in us all, making us human and differentiating us from machines or constructions of any kind, regardless of how magical they are. A being that is created by means other than normal birth are without that spark that Oscar compares to being an orphan – missing that indefinable something – the past unknowable.

Callie reveals how her relationship with her brother developed and became an indelible part of her life, and her understanding for the people who lost their children during the plague. She tells Oscar that while having magical children is wrong, they exist now and that she and Oscar have a responsibility to help them as much as they can.

Discussion Question 1

How is Oscar rescued, and what is the reason that the rescue is mounted to begin with?

Discussion Question 2

What is the reason Lord Cooper gives Oscar and Callie for having magical children in the first place, and why did so many other families follow suit?

Discussion Question 3

What is the basic flaw that enters a plan where only magic children exist and with a limited number of wizard trees, what kind of future is in store for the people of the City and why?

Vocabulary

unrelenting, litany, appraised, interjected, obscuring, traumatized



Chapter Nineteen: Endings

Summary

Although the monster is gone, Oscar knows it isn't the root of the problem. He tells Callie how he dumped all the magic he could on the ground to sate the hunger, but that it needed much more. He tells her that the hole is still there, and monsters will continue to come as long as there is enough magic left to create one and admits that he doesn't think there should be any more magic. Callie agrees and they spend the evening going through the library, but find no precedent for getting rid of magic. They realize that it is like any other system and they have to introduce something that will affect the entire circulatory system.

Eventually Callie heads home. Oscar looks out at the deserted marketplace. The shuttered bakery reminds him of how things used to be, and he sits down to compose a letter to Mister Malcolm telling him about the soil monster and how it killed Caleb. He also tells him how he killed it, and that he and Callie plan to eliminate magic altogether. He says they both have to stay in Barrow so that they can look after the children, but suggests Malcolm come back to bake bread.

He dreams of the plaguelands and the next morning shows Callie a segment written by Master Galen about them. The notation says the plague killed everything and some places had become a vacuum. He suggests the possibility that the wizards had done all they could, including creating the plaguelands so that people wouldn't go west in the hopes that they would survive.

Callie and Oscar go to the center of the forest, and head for the biggest wizard tree – Oscar's favorite. The tree seems to have aged considerably, and looks tired. Oscar caresses the trunk, asking it if this is what it wanted. All he feels is the steady warmth he always has. Despite how tired it seems, and how abused it has been by colleagues, the tree still gives generously. Oscar makes a poultice out of plagueland dirt and seawater and Callie massages it into the roots of the tree. It had been a beautiful lie – the idea that magic could exist without monsters. The tree begins to drink in the mud and Oscar's eyes fill. Callie holds his hand, and after some time, suggests they leave. The walk home is silent, but the marketplace is busy when they return. Shop owners are repairing or rebuilding and a familiar bleat tells them that Madame Catherine's goat has also returned. Oscar's tears begin again.

The following day, Callie and Oscar deliver remedies to the families they'd already seen, along with a few others they'd become aware of. Callie is still trying to decide how to approach the rest. Oscar asks Callie if she'll return to the Eastern Villages, but she admits it isn't her home anymore. She insists she has no intention of abandoning the children who need them. Callie tells Oscar she can be a healer, and Oscar realizes that to Callie, people are like plants are to Oscar. She tells him she'll need a garden,



implying that will be his contribution. She suggests that Oscar turn the shop into an apothecary, and reminds them of their deal to help each other.

They go to the Cooper residence first and confirm that the children are improving. Lady Cooper fears they will get ill again, and Oscar admits that they just don't know since nothing quite like them has ever existed before. Sophie draws Oscar closer with a look and whispers 'monster?' to him. He tells her that it no longer exists and pulls out the wooden cat. It hums in his hand and he gives it to her, telling her it will keep her company. She smiles when he tells her that cat's name is Block and Oscar can see that although she is made of wood, she is real now.

Analysis

Hunger is the first theme in this final segment as Oscar struggles with the fact that it seems to surround him. The monster is hungry for magic; the Barrow residents are clamoring for every charm and potion they can find when danger appears; and the City people substitute magic for people. It seems that they are all content to ignore the wizard's warnings and care more about keeping magic than containing the plague.

Magic is a theme throughout as Oscar admits his belief that they should destroy it completely. Callie agrees and though they research the subject, they can find no precedent for eliminating it. The books are filled with magical ethics; theories; and both practical and impractical applications.

History is also a theme as Oscar realizes that City people learned nothing from the sacrifice made by the wizards to save them. Now they seem to be repeating the same mistakes, coveting small enchantments over all else. Oscar and Callie know from reading the books in Caleb's library that something has to change, and Oscar believes that regardless of how angry some people may get with him about it, he has to get rid of magic once and for all.

Research leads Oscar to discover that the plaguelands may have been created by wizards in an effort to stop the plague from spreading. Galen wrote that neither seed, nor magic could be carried across this wasteland, implying that magic was the plague they fought.

Emotions are an ongoing theme throughout this story as Oscar learns how to identify and respond to the people around him. His emotional growth is steady throughout this story beginning with learning how to read and respond to Caleb and Wolf and continuing with the friendship offered by Callie. As the story progresses, Oscar learns selflessness; courage; joy; and greed, but the greatest and strongest of emotions he learns comes from the wizard trees themselves originally, but extends to include the cats and Callie as well. The name he gives the feelings he has for all of these things is love. Love was what the wizards felt for the people of Aletheia and but especially now as Oscar realizes that the wizard trees are still warm and receptive; still giving off a steady vitality that didn't lessen despite the fact that their magic had been used and



abused by those that they so valiantly protected. They continued to provide a tactile peace and warmth that Oscar felt to his core. It is difficult for Oscar to say goodbye to the trees that he befriended and felt such a strong connection to, but he hopes that once the magic dissipates, the trees will be able to exist by getting nourishment from the ground.

Life and death are at the center of the struggle Oscar and Callie face, and they go into the woods despite their fear and unsure as to whether their plan would work. Oscar knows that what they are doing will kill the magic of the wizard trees, setting them free in a way, and by extension, setting the City people free as well.

Dependency is an overall theme – one that Oscar and Callie are determined to overcome by getting rid of the enchantments that the City people and Barrow folk have become so reliant on. Oscar and Callie both realize that the people will be upset, but know that it is the only solution.

Sorrow is also a new theme as Oscar cries for the loss of the wizard trees, and by extension, the wizards themselves. It is a heaviness that hangs over them as they leave the trees and go back to the marketplace.

Responsibility is also a strong theme throughout this story as both Callie and Oscar feel it is their duty to cure the children of the City and to remain so that they can continue to monitor and adjust the cure they provided as necessary. Callie considers the Barrow home, and she plans to stay regardless of the fact that Madame Mariel would not be returning, and she informs Oscar that she will require a garden to provide the herbs and plants necessary for her to continue as a healer in Barrow. She suggests that with Oscar's knowledge and the library beneath the store, Oscar could open and run an apothecary.

Fear continues to be a theme as Callie and Oscar work their way through the City dispensing cures to the children Caleb made. Lady Cooper worries that her children may become sick again, and Oscar and Callie are unable to reassure her the way that Caleb might have. Instead, they opt to tell her the truth which is that they can only do their best. Aside from that, both the children and their parents would have to live with the decisions they made in the past.

Discussion Question 1

What is the solution that Oscar and Callie come up with and how do they dispense it?

Discussion Question 2

What feeling does Oscar name when they reach the largest wizard tree, and what other examples of this feeling has he already experienced?



Discussion Question 3

What plans do Callie and Oscar make for their future, and how does this exemplify the growth that both have experienced since the story began?

Vocabulary

obscured, chronicles, circulatory, tactile, dissipate, apothecary



Characters

Oscar

Oscar is an 11-year-old orphan with thick black hair and little experience dealing with people. Master Caleb removes him from the Children's Home so that he can look after those tasks that are too menial for him or his apprentice to have to do. It is Oscar's job to extract plant oils, grind leaves into powders, fill small vials with tinctures, and collect any herbs or plants required by Master Caleb.

Oscar lives in the cellar in a small room where he is kept company by a regular parade of cats of all kinds. His life is simple and uncomplicated until the day that Wolf is killed and Oscar is expected to fill his position until other arrangements can be made. Oscar has little in the way of people skills, and struggles even to make eye contact with most. As such, to be placed in charge of tending the store while Caleb is gone is so taxing that he can hardly wait to return to his cellar and the simplicity his life used to be. Unfortunately, that isn't the future in store for him.

While Oscar is in charge of the store, he is forced to deal with magic breaking down in several areas. One of them is the garden and Caleb's glass house which Oscar finds destroyed. The healer's apprentice Callie comes to Oscar for help with City children who are sick and they reach an agreement where Callie will help Oscar with customers in the shop while he helps her to diagnose the illnesses City children are suffering from. Oscar learns how to map the emotional responses of customers and make note of their expressions so that he can deal with them himself.

Master Caleb returns and is furious that Oscar has spent so little time keeping the store open. He slaps Oscar across the face and assures him that his days of extra responsibility are over, but that isn't how things go. That very evening, Caleb is killed when a monster breaks through the wall of Caleb's shop, destroying or consuming everything magic.

Callie and Oscar realize that magic is breaking down in the City children, and Callie asks Oscar if he can make something to cure them. He puts together a selection of herbs that actually will work and leaves them with Callie while he goes into the forest to tackle the problem with magic. He feeds the roots of the wizard trees with every magic compound he can find, but somehow there is still a need for more. The monster appears and Oscar leads it through the plaguelands and into the sea. That isn't a solution, he realizes however, and later he and Callie will return with a jar of plaguelands dirt and a container of seawater. Making a poultice from them, they spread it on the roots of the largest wizard tree. Magic is destroyed and Oscar together with Callie will assume the responsibility to care for the City children.



Callie

Callie is Madame Mariel's apprentice. Callie has curly black hair and is a couple of years older than Oscar. She has darting eyes and wears a red cloak. Oscar first becomes aware of Callie when she comes into Caleb's store with Madame Mariel. Oscar is struggling to cope with customers and Callie is kind to him.

The next time Callie goes to Caleb's shop, she does so alone and asks him for help with some of the patients who have come to see her. While their respective guardians are gone, Callie and Oscar share the responsibility for the health and well-being of the residents of Barrow and the City. When Callie realizes that magic is failing in her patients, she and Oscar learn just how much magic is being used in the City.

Callie, with the help of Oscar manages not only to successfully identify the issues causing the problems - namely magic - but also treat the ongoing illnesses spreading through the City and save the City and Barrow from the detrimental effects of magic by eliminating it.

Once the answers are found and the threats eliminated, Callie decides to stay in Barrow – the place she considers to be her home now and continue on as a healer despite the fact that Madame Mariel has decided not to return.

Master Caleb

Master Caleb is the first magician the Barrow has had in a generation and, similar to most magic smiths, he is training an apprentice. Unlike wizards of times gone by, Master Caleb also hired an orphan named Oscar, whom he found at the Children's Home, to do any work considered to be too menial for the attentions of a magician's apprentice. Master Caleb has tree dark eyes and his face has a weathered look almost like bark. He is an even tempered man mostly, but can be pushed to physical aggression when under stress.

Caleb travels to the continent frequently, and both Oscar and Callie come to the conclusion that he must have found a way to take magic across the plaguelands. It is suggested that there, without the taxes from the duke, they would be more prosperous than they are in Barrow. After one such trip to the coast, Caleb returns to find his shop has been closed more than open. Angry, he tells Oscar that his days in the shop have ended, and slaps his face hard. Later that evening, a magic monster attacks the shop and in the process of saving Oscar, Caleb is killed by the monster.

Wolf

Wolf is Master Caleb's apprentice. He is almost twice the height of Oscar, though only four years his senior and calls Oscar Mouse. Though he thinks very highly of himself, Wolf's apprenticeship is short lived. At the first opportunity, during one of the times that



he is in charge because Caleb is on the continent, Wolf pushes Oscar to look after the store while he takes Bonnie, Master Robin's apprentice, into the north woods with him on important business. Both are violently killed and Wolf's remains are returned by Master Robin in a sack.

Master Robin

Master Robin is the Barrow guardian and has recently gotten a new apprentice named Bonnie. The apprentice he had before Bonnie had an accident involving a tree and a warding spell. Master Robin is a large man and in fact might be the largest man in the Barrow. He has hands so large that they are the size of Oscar's head.

Bonnie

Bonnie is Master Robin's new apprentice, replacing the one who had an accident involving a tree and a warding spell. Bonnie has long and straight dark hair and wears a red cloak held together by the pin. She goes into the north woods with Wolf and neither one of them returns alive.

Madame Mariel

Madame Mariel is the Barrow healer and her apprentice is named Callie. She wears a gray cloak over her long brown skirt and white shirt.

Lord Cooper

Lord Cooper is a Lord from Asteri who comes into Master Caleb's shop while he is away. He is impeccably groomed and is wearing a green cloak. Lord Cooper wants to buy an amulet for Sophie who has just turned five and asks which one is the best. Told they are all the same, he leaves with nothing.

Mister Malcolm

Mister Malcolm is the baker that Oscar usually goes to every Sunday and every Wednesday. He is thin and tall and at least 20 years older than Oscar. He has hair that is the color of iron, going white in areas and his skin is like bark.

Master Christopher

Master Christopher owns the tavern in the marketplace. He warns Oscar to watch himself and his tongue, warning that someone prowled the marketplace at night. He tells Oscar that not only is the Most Spectacular Goat missing; but Madame Aphra's



cloth had turned to bits when she hung it out to dry and Madame Alexanders' hides had been found in bits as well.

Madame Sabine

Madame Sabine is the carpenter, and she is the one who helps to construct a wall from her special wood to repair the one that the monster tore out of Caleb's shop.

Madame Elodie

Madame Elodie is the person that takes care of horses in the area where City people park their carriages; keeping the animals from spooking.

Crow (Cat)

Crow is the gray cat with the green eyes like lanterns that tries to hurry Oscar out of the room when she hears Wolf coming. She prefers to visit in the morning and likes to curl up in the parchment envelopes.

Pebble (Cat)

Pebble is a small orange kitten who likes to lie on Oscar's bed.

Map (Cat)

Map is a thin cat with black spots that are spread around on top of white fur that make it look as though they are islands on a white ocean.

Bear (Cat)

Bear is the big white fluffy puffball of a cat that makes grunting noises when she is asleep.

Block

Block is the small wooden cat that Oscar carves from the wooden pieces that he'd found days earlier in the forest. At the time, Oscar doesn't realize it, but the pieces of wood are wood shavings from the wizard tree that Caleb had cut down.

Block, because he is made from special wood, is warm and almost seems to hum when you hold him. Oscar gives Block to Sophie and tells her it will keep her company, despite how hard it is for him to give the little carving away.



Symbols and Symbolism

Oak Trees

The oak trees in the forest number 100 in total and each one was once a wizard who walked the streets of Barrow. When the time to die came, they choose instead to plant themselves, transforming into the mighty oaks that now continue to provide magic through their roots, deep into the soil of the gardens.

Described as growing 'like ladders for giants or gods', the oaks are as majestic and regal as the magicians they once were, so powerful they cannot die.

Leaf Pin

A leaf pin is worn by all apprentices, given to symbolize their status as a magician's apprentice by the duke.

Glass House

Caleb grows specialty plants and herbs in a 'glass house'. There is a saying that 'people in glass houses shouldn't throw rocks'.

Caleb threw his rock when he began to cut down the five wizard trees, creating a hole in magic that was insatiable. The monster it spawned demolishes the glass house, bringing the proverb to life.

Bread

Bread is symbolic of life and in this story gives two characters life. Oscar tells Callie that bread with occasional cheese is all that he eats. It has been his only sustenance for as long as he can remember.

Mister Malcolm is the baker and his life is tied to bread as well. He was once a wizard but traded in that life in order to spend his time more creatively - by bringing bread into the world.

Magic

Magic, in this story, begins as the symbol of everything great. When there was a problem, magic solved it; where there was a deal, magic would help seal it; if a heart needed changing or encouraging, magic was there. Magic was the beginning and the end.



Magic, in this story, is symbolic of the people's desire to have the perfect 'Little House On The Prairie' lifestyle and represents both their dreams and their shortcomings.

To satisfy the ever growing need for magic, Caleb harvested five of the wizard trees, turning them into children for people in the city, but by taking out so much of the magic, he created a hole which caused the magic to begin failing. With insatiable hunger, a magic mud monster consumed everything magic in its path, killing Caleb as well and magic became the enemy.

Plaguelands

The plaguelands were created by wizards as a last attempt to keep magic from leaving, knowing that once the magic was gone, it was gone. The plaguelands is where Oscar takes the monster, reasoning that it killed all magic and would therefore kill it as well.

Cellar

The cellar is where Oscar lives, and can hardly remember a past that stretches back before his time there. The cellar represents Oscar's comfort zone - symbolizing the one place he feels safe and secure. As is with everything in life however there comes a time when one must leave the security and safety of home and take a risk in life.

Wizard Wood

Wizard wood is the wood that Caleb used to create children for those who lived in the City. The wood harvested once lived, great wizards one and all who sacrificed their lives in order to save Aletheia. They stood as symbols of their lives and the sacrifices they were willing to make for the people of the City. Though representative of the lives sacrificed, the wizard wood even when enchanted cannot create what truly constitutes life - the soul.

Block

Block is the small cat that Oscar carves out of wizard tree wood and eventually he gives it to Sophie, telling her that it will keep her company. Oscar knows the wood is no longer 'alive' as such, but Block is warm and a comfort to have and to hold.

Wooden Children

The wooden children created by Caleb in this tale are symbolic of the kind of ongoing concerns that every parent has.

No parent wants their children to suffer or to feel pain, and it is unthinkable that a child might die, so the couples of Asteri commission Caleb to create an 'unbreakable' child. They wanted a child that would survive and thrive forever, and Caleb provided a near enough representation of a child that all thoughts of procreation were set aside.



Settings

Asteri (aka The Shining City)

Asteri is a hilltop town called the City by those who lived there. Those who lived elsewhere called residents of Asteri the 'shining people' and the city itself the Shining City. Stone walls which are writhed with enchantments and are almost as tall as the trees below surround the city for their protection.

Barrow

Barrow is the name given to the forest and surrounding darkness at the bottom of Asteri, and is where the marketplace is. Magic smiths ply their trades and sell their wares. The Barrow is where the monster first shows itself to Oscar when it attacks Master Caleb and kills him.

Children's Home

The Children's Home is where Oscar came from, located on the eastern side of Aletheia where no magic exists. He remembers little about it, and tries not to think about it too much.

Aletheia

The island of Aletheia consists of the Barrow; the City; the plaguelands and even the Children's Home where Oscar had once lived. Eastern Aletheia is a region that is mostly farmland and has no magic and no forested region, bordering on the sea. When the plague had come, the island of Aletheia had mostly been spared because of its geography, and because of its magical properties.

Gardens

Caleb's gardens are located in the southeast, and are hidden by an illusion spell so that anyone else who looked for them would see a meadow instead. The garden contains countless species of trees and plants, and the Wizard trees as well.

Barrow Forest

The Barrow forest contains exactly 100 wizard trees, each infusing the earth with magic that spreads down into the ground through their roots. In this way, the wizards continue to serve Aletheia.



Glass House

Called the greatest creation of man in the forest, the glass house was created by Caleb to house the plants and herbs from far away that required somewhere warm and moist to grow. A peaked glass roof tops the glass walls that create a world of warmth and light.



Themes and Motifs

Magic Vs. Reality

Asteri, called simply the City by those who lived in it or the Shining City by those who lived around it, is surrounded by large stone walls that are alive with enchantments. The residents are protected by magic, and watched over by one hundred wizard trees that have stood in a circle around the City since the days of the plague. It was then that collectively the wizards sacrificed themselves to save the City which was dying. The wizards willingly sacrificed themselves; rooting themselves in the ground and infusing it with all of their collective magic to give the region the strength it required to fight the plague. After that happened, there were no wizards for a long time, but then one day Master Caleb arrived and became the newest in a long line of magicians who had sworn to protect the land of Aletheia and its people.

Although Master Caleb owns the journals created by the last wizards, he is more than a little skeptical. He believes that the wizards simply fled, leaving the residents to fend for themselves. As such, his allegiances are more self-involved and are more concerned with his ability to increase his own wealth rather than his vow to protect the land and its people.

Caleb creates and sells enchantments, spells, potions and lotions to the residents of the City and surrounding Barrow. The more magic he provides however, the more people want. Their desire to eliminate chance from every equation drives an insatiable need. Soon they expect enchantments to help them in business, potions to attract love, herbs to enhance beauty and in general, they expected magical assistance in every aspect of their lives. They even use tokens to ensure their apologies will be accepted and to ensure they will be forgiven.

When the children of the City begin to get sick, Callie, the healer struggles to understand why. In time, she realizes that the children aren't suffering from any illness of any particular kind, but are instead magical creations of which the magic is failing. Callie and Oscar learn that Caleb had created magical children for most of the residents of the City using wood from the magical wizard trees - five of which he had already sacrificed for the creation of these children. By commissioning magically made children however, the residents of the City had stopped any normal reproduction. As a result, their magical children were never supposed to suffer or become ill. They would never have children of their own, and would never continue their family lines beyond themselves, but for the present time, their parents are blissfully ignorant, sure that magic will help them when that time comes as well.

The children forfeited - those that would have been conceived naturally and without magical intervention - are a loss that will be felt for generations. The parents of their magical alternatives may indeed know a certain sense of peace that they should never suffer, but they will never know life either as they are without souls or hearts.



Magic, once used as an assistance to their daily lives had now taken over so completely that the residents of the City were unable or unwilling to do without it, but to save their children, Oscar and Callie would have to eliminate magic once and for all.

Apprentices Vs. Professionals

In this story, Callie is an apprentice to the healer, although unlike most apprentices, she has no natural magical talent. She does however have experience with herbs and cures, and is very good with patients including children. She originated from an Eastern Village where she was apprenticed to a healer, but her parents gave her to Madame Mariel, the healer of Barrow in return for treatment for her very sick younger brother. To pay for the medicine, Callie would be an indentured apprentice.

Oscar is the replacement apprentice for Master Caleb the wizard when his real apprentice Wolf is killed in the woods one day. Though only hired as a hand originally, Oscar has a great understanding of herbs and their properties and knows how to mix them to create even stronger concoctions. He is not comfortable with other people however.

Their respective masters, Madame Mariel and Master Caleb play very small roles in this story and in the lives of their apprentices as both are out of town on the continent more than they are home, attempting to set up their businesses in an area that has no magic at present. If they can do so, they will be able to avoid paying taxes to the duke. By allowing greed to dictate their lives, they are gone when they are needed most, and in Caleb's case especially, he is too far away to protect anyone from anything.

Callie and Oscar are required to step up and save the day and they do so without reservation despite the hardship it costs them both. Oscar must face his fears, and his general, overall insecurities while Callie must be able to expand her view of the City residents and see them as a group connected by their magical children. Not only do the apprentices save the City children who are failing at a spectacular rate; but they are also responsible for ridding the Barrow and City of the magical monsters that hungrily preyed on it on a nightly basis; the same monsters that took Master Caleb's life. Rather than hide or run to safety, Oscar and Callie stay, bound by their responsibilities to the area and its residents.

Oscar and Callie create a poultice from plaguelands dirt and sea water, and apply it to the roots of the largest wizard tree. The result is an almost immediate correction that is felt all the way to the Barrow.

By responding to the needs of the City people in a responsible and knowledgeable manner, they are able not only to diagnose the issue causing trouble, but also eliminate magic altogether when it is proven to be the source of the violence, damage and illnesses. It is clear to them that magic requires a balance of sorts. They understand that by becoming so dependent on magic, they had created an imbalance that resulted in a driving need to correct itself.



Friendship

Friendship is an important theme in this tale and has a huge impact on two of the primary characters, Oscar and Callie. When the story opens, Oscar is introduced as an emotional punching bag for Master Caleb's apprentice named Wolf who regularly abuses Oscar when Caleb is away or out of earshot. Wolf is so consistently mean that Oscar isn't overly sorry when he gets the news that he was killed in the woods while Caleb was away.

Unfortunately, that requires Oscar to step up and take over some of the tasks Wolf may have done in the past such as minding the store while Caleb is gone. Oscar struggles with people in general, seldom understanding them. Callie comes into the store with Madame Mariel and extends her friendship to Oscar when some customers are less than understanding with him. She returns the following day, and offers to help Oscar with the customers in the store if he will agree to help her diagnose and treat an increasing number of patients from the City. Oscar agrees and their friendship is born.

Callie teaches Oscar much more than just how to serve customers correctly. She also corrects him when he stumbles socially, or says things that most people would keep to themselves. Oscar is equally generous with his knowledge about plants and herbs, explaining how things work together. He also allows Callie to peruse Caleb's library containing everything from wizard journals to histories to magic.

Their friendship is strengthened through trials. Callie learns that her brother has been dead for some time, and at the same time discovers that Madame Mariel will not be returning. Oscar leans on Callie when he discovers that Caleb's garden has been violated and his glass house destroyed. He also depends on her when Caleb is killed by the monster, and he learns that Mister Malcolm the baker is leaving.

Without their friendship, Oscar would not have been able to consider the fact that he could continue running the shop as an apothecary and Callie would likely still be second guessing her instincts and rather than acting on them, reacting to the individual cases as they presented themselves.

The strength of their friendship allows them to face the hunger magic felt, partially caused by the hole in magic and partially caused by the overall residents' ongoing greed for magic in all forms. Their friendship also enables them to see a future in which by working together they can not only heal the magical children in the City, but also keep them well.

Though merely apprentices at best (and in Oscar's case not even that much), Oscar and Callie take the promise to protect the area and its residents seriously, and they agree to stay on despite neither of them under the care or control of a Master or Madame. Their behavior together is strong enough to warrant respect despite their youth and lack of training and their dedication to the residents and the area speaks for itself. Though merely apprentices at best (and in Oscar's case not even that much),



Oscar and Callie take the promise to protect the area and its residents seriously, and they agree to stay.

Herbs and Healing

This story is one that opens in days when there are no such things as pharmaceutical companies; there are no prescriptions; there are no hospitals or clinics and there are no specialists in the way that we understand them in the medical community. This story heralds back to a time when the closest you could come to a physician was the healer in town and the nearest thing to a prescription was butterbur for a headache and was likely prescribed by someone like Callie, the healer's apprentice, or Oscar, the magician's hand.

Callie is the first line of defense when for parents in the City when their children begin to get sick. The diagnosis is one that escapes her for a time as it presents differently in each child afflicted. For example, in Ronald's case, his mind begins to deteriorate until he is unable to remember anything at all, including his own mother. Lord Cooper's son Hugo is weak and his hands and feet are swollen; Jasper has a rash that is scaly and then Lord Cooper's daughter also becomes sick, but she appears to be without a heartbeat entirely.

Oscar is Master Caleb, the wizard's hand, assigned to clean, pick and prepare herbs and potions and stock shelves. When Caleb and Wolf are both dead, he is left to his own devices. Oscar is also responsible for dispensing cures and solutions for a whole host of possible concerns which included a recommendation of passionflower for goats, pigs and chickens that were agitated; or perhaps the use of cloves for a fever; or Balm of Gilead for swelling. Callie asks him for help with the children who are sick, and convinces him to do house calls with her in the City, but Oscar struggles with the entire concept. Oscar can sit in the cellar and be given almost any ailment and be able to sift through his memory of plant books and pantry shelves, and come up with the exact combination of ingredients necessary to provide relief from whatever the symptoms are, but put in front of the clients themselves, the symptoms become people and everything else disappears in the face of the suffering he sees.

Oscar's knowledge extends much further. Not only does he know how to identify and prepare most of the cures he dispenses, but he also knows how to compliment most cures to ensure they work their best. He walks by bluebottle and knows that it is good for eyes or for wounds while a salve made from nettle and oat straw rubbed into bandages will help to set a bone and bandages wrapped with chamomile and witch hazel will promote healing while valerian root helps to handle pain.

Oscar's knowledge of plants and herbs is extensive and as a result, he is able to heal the cats who have been hurt and come up with a cure for the magical children in the City who are sick. He and Callie manage to put an end to the magical disruptions, by finding a way to eliminate magic from the island of Aletheia entirely.



Small Enchantments Vs. Real Magic

In this story, magic has gone awry. A balance is required in all things and the people of Asteri and the surrounding Barrow had forgotten that. They had become so dependent on a myriad of small enchantments that they used magic to deal with most aspects of their lives. Asterians have used magic for so long that they now believe it is their right to have that magic in their lives. As such, they regularly consume magical ales; wear enchanted jewels or wear-proof boots. They buy charms for luck; magical dust to sprinkle on money to make it grow; take potions to slow aging or use lotions to enhance beauty; buy charms to help win disputes and even wear clothing made of magical materials that will never wear out.

The City people have statues of bird that sing; pictures on tapestries that change; flowers that bloom perpetually; silver that repels tarnish; glass that can't be broken and wood that is strengthened by magic. There are charms to make people forgive you and even some that enable the user to win a dispute. Of all of the enchantments however, the most damaging to the magic of the region are the children that Caleb creates for the parents in the City who want children that will never have to suffer. These children, Oscar discovers, are being made from the wood of the wizard trees. By cutting them down, not only did Caleb negate the sacrifice made by them to begin with, but he also took the lives they had by cutting down the tree they had become. Five wizards had died to create the existing children in the City. The five missing trees create a hole in the magic from which it seems unable to recover.

All of these enchantments create an ongoing drain on the magic of the region without the balance it requires to maintain itself. This balance soon corrects itself however as the emptiness left behind from the overuse of magic demanded to be filled. Forest detritus gathered itself together in a monstrous form and came into the Barrow seeking magic and consuming all it found.

What Oscar finally realizes is that everything the people of both the City and Barrow want as far as magic goes can be described as small enchantments, and while they might be horrified to find out their access to these 'helpers' is cut off, Oscar knows that they are all capable of coping without. The real magic, as Oscar is slowly coming to realize, comes from friendship and the feeling of belonging that a community can provide. Real magic is what happens when people stop waiting for small enchantments to work for them. As such, he and Callie go into the forest, and stop at Oscar's favorite wizard tree. They rub a combination of plague dirt and sea water onto the roots of the tree and allow it to be drawn down into the interconnected roots of all 95 remaining wizard trees.

Styles

Point of View

The Real Boy, by Anne Ursu is a fictional tale that is told from third person limited perspective of its main character, a young orphan child named Oscar. This differs from a third person omniscient in that only Oscar's thoughts and feelings are explored with any depth. It also differs from a first person perspective because it is the author's voice that is heard throughout the descriptive passages rather than the character's voice. All characters in this story are described with the use of pronouns such as 'he', 'she', or 'they', but the character Oscar is the only one followed closely from the beginning of the story to the end although the personal descriptor 'I' is not used. The narrative is strong and reliable throughout, giving the reader an in-depth look at a segment of Oscar's life beginning at the age of 11, when Oscar is already in Caleb's employ.

This form of narrative gives the author the freedom to share background information on more than just Oscar's character by discussing them as though the author is looking down on them rather than being discussed by the character themselves as would be the case in a first person point of view which is much more limiting.

Reading the story, Oscar's thoughts and feelings are clear, and the reader follows his character closely as the story progresses. Oscar is only a child when the magician Master Caleb comes to take him from the Children's Home to employ him as his hand and he remembers little of his childhood before his life with the only magician to serve in Barrow for a generation. The Real Boy, by Anne Ursu is a fictional tale that is told from third person limited perspective of its main character, a young orphan child named Oscar. This differs from a third person omniscient in that only Oscar's thoughts and feelings are explored with any depth. It also differs from a first person perspective because it is the author's voice that is heard throughout the descriptive passages rather than the character's voice. All characters in this story are described with the use of pronouns such as 'he', 'she', or 'they', but the character Oscar is the only one followed closely from the beginning of the story to the end and the personal descriptor 'I' is not used. The narrative is strong and reliable throughout, giving the reader an in-depth look at a segment of Oscar's life beginning at the age of eleven, when Oscar is already in Caleb's employ.

An example of this kind of narrative can be seen in the conversation Madame Mariel has with Oscar when she comes into Caleb's shop and asks for Caleb. Oscar tells her that Caleb isn't there, but she persists. Then 'Her cheeks puffed out and she blew air from them' which Oscar is sure means something, but he has no idea what. Another example can be seen when Master Julian comes into the shop and Oscar's whole body rebels. The author describes how Oscar's heart pounds and his throat dries as he grips the counter. In both of these examples, Oscar's feelings are well described and made known to the reader while the customers feelings and thoughts are not.



Language and Meaning

The Real Boy is a story written by Anne Ursu and aimed at a young adolescent market. The story revolves around an 11-year-old orphan boy named Oscar who battles magic monsters with his new friend Callie, the apprentice to Barrow's healer, Madame Mariel. The language is uncomplicated English and the narrative is reliable which makes for an easy read for almost any age.

The story revolves around the use and misuse of magic, and how greed and self interest can cloud judgement and decision making. Caleb the magician is generally a good man who tries to make everyone happy. As such, he finds himself in an impossible situation and what begins as a single solution to a parents' grief becomes a City wide expectation. Caleb creates the first enchanted boy using wood from a wizard tree and before long has removed a total of five wizard trees from the Barrow forest leaving a hole in the fabric of magic in that area which will affect them all.

Oscar reads the wizard's chronicles and learns that the hundred large wizard trees surrounding the City are much more than just name and legend. Each of the one hundred wizard trees was once a wizard who lived on the island of Aletheia. Collectively they made the decision to sacrifice themselves in a last effort to save the people they'd been sworn to protect and serve by surrendering themselves to the earth so that an infusion of magic into the soil by way of their transformation might save the region. Their sacrifice is successful, but as time passes, the City and Barrow residents forget the reasons for this sacrifice, and eventually they even forget the fact that real wizards sacrificed themselves at all. Caleb, although a magician himself, doesn't believe there was a sacrifice, believing instead that the wizards had simply abandoned Asteri and its residents to their fate. As such, he has no qualms with harvesting these special trees in order to satisfy the growing needs of the community. In no time, the over use or abuse of small enchantments is so widespread that once again a vacuum exists in magic. Once again, balance must be restored.

At the same time, the author is able to show how courage can replace panic and solutions can come from effort as both Oscar and Callie begin by feeling totally ill-equipped to deal with the problems they are facing. Since both are employees of professionals, they find themselves in charge at the worst of times. Monsters wreck things; marketplace and gardens are rampaged and all while the professionals are too far away to help. Children are falling ill at a spectacular rate and together they manage to diagnose and repair the issues causing the disruption of magic.

The author uses this tale as an example of the consequence of greed; the danger of becoming self-involved; the values of friendship and the sacrifices made. Anne Ursu also uses Oscar's lack of social skills as an opportunity to give examples of manners; proper etiquette; and having consideration for the feelings of others.



Structure

The Real Boy by Anne Ursu is a tale of 185 pages which is further divided into 19 chapters. These chapters range in length from 6-12 pages and average 9 pages each overall.

Each chapter is further defined by a short descriptive that is representative of the main point established in the chapter. For example, the first chapter is titled 'The Cellar Boy' and introduces Oscar as the main character, revealing his life as Master Caleb's hand and further describing how he lives in the cellar underneath Master Caleb's shop. The second chapter is titled 'Wolf's Revenge' and describes how Wolf gets even with Oscar for making him look bad to Caleb by leaving him to watch the store while he and another apprentice leave for the day, fully aware that Oscar is uncomfortable around people and has poor to almost non-existent people skills.

In chapter three, Wolf is returned to Caleb's shop in a sack, killed in the forest and this is the beginning of change for young Oscar who is now given more responsibility than he wants or needs as he is asked to step up and help out more. In chapter six, Callie offers Oscar a deal which will help them both. She needs help diagnosing and caring for the increasing number of children who are becoming sick, and Oscar desperately needs help learning how to deal with customers correctly and without insulting them unintentionally.

The first half of this story gives the reader information about the area, and reveals how the wizards in the past had sacrificed themselves so that the region would survive the plague that came. The second half of this story reveals how magic is failing and Oscar, along with his only friend Callie take on the responsibility of repairing the damage done by eliminating magic.

Chapter eleven reveals the secrets behind the wizard trees and in chapter twelve, Oscar believes that he finally understands the reasons for his shortcomings - he is a creation of enchanted wood made by Caleb.

By chapter sixteen, Oscar and Callie have discovered the secret kept by Caleb and the City residents. Their children are created by wizard wood, enchanted to live their lives without suffering, but the hole in magic caused by their very creation may be their undoing if Callie and Oscar are unable to repair the damage done.

Oscar and Callie manage to put an end to all magic by poisoning the magic trees that surround the City. The last vestiges of the sacrifice they made is undone.



Quotes

Everything is better here than anywhere else in the world.

-- Lady from the city (chapter 1 paragraph 42)

Importance: The lady from Asteri who comes into Caleb's shop for raspberry leaves is convinced that life there is better than it is anywhere else in the world and this belief is reinforced when Master Caleb offers to make her a perfume that would enhance her already natural beauty.

You think you can make me look bad in front of Master Caleb?

-- Wolf (chapter 2 paragraph 11)

Importance: Wolf is angry with Oscar but his anger is misplaced. He believes that Oscar is trying to show him up, but the truth is that Oscar is well read and simply better informed where subjects of herbs and their uses are concerned.

I don't know anything.

-- Oscar (chapter 3 paragraph 4)

Importance: Oscar learns that Wolf is dead when Master Robin arrives with his remains in a sack, and he is so stunned that he can only repeat over and over that he doesn't know anything - a reaction of extreme shock and emotional distress.

You have not had much experience with people, and it shows in your manner.

-- Master Caleb (chapter 4 paragraph 17)

Importance: Master Caleb acknowledges Oscar's lack of skill where people are concerned, but still asks Oscar to overcome his discomfort and step up to help him in this time of need after Wolf's demise.

What you gave me yesterday (treatment for hives) worked splendidly, but I'm afraid the whole family has them now.

-- Callie (chapter 5 paragraph 41)

Importance: Callie asks Master Caleb to give her more of the treatment she'd gotten the day before, unaware that it wasn't Caleb that put it together. Oscar had combined the herbs she needed, and had allowed her to believe that Caleb had done it, sure that she wouldn't trust the judgement or knowledge of an 11-year-old boy.

You can't just go around telling people they're wrong.

-- Callie (chapter 6 paragraph 25)

Importance: Callie mistakenly asks Oscar for barberry for a patient who has headaches, but Oscar corrects her, telling her that what she really needs is butterbur.



His lack of experience dealing with customers shows as Callie is offended by his manner, and suggests that he tell people nicely if they are mistaken.

People treat it (magic) like some cheap little thing, a commodity that serves at their pleasure.

-- Mister Malcolm (chapter 7 paragraph 39)

Importance: Mister Malcolm reveals that he was once a magician but that he gave up that practice and now the only thing he creates is bread. He tries to tell Oscar that magic serves at it's own pleasure and not at the will of others which is an important lesson for Oscar to understand.

I think this problem is bigger than an apprentice and a hand can fix.

-- Callie (chapter 8 paragraph 15)

Importance: Callie and Oscar have just returned from discovering that the gardens had been attacked. She tries to snap Oscar out of the shock-induced fugue state he has been in since discovering the damage done.

Did the City spring up fully formed from the ground, complete with excessive topiary and people who think they are better than everyone else?

-- Callie (chapter 9 paragraph 8)

Importance: Callie and Oscar discuss the City and Callie tries to get Oscar to understand that although the City folk pat themselves on the back for the magic they enjoy, they do nothing for themselves.

Oscar, I brought you here because I thought you could help me figure out what's causing all of this.

-- Callie (chapter 10 paragraph 15)

Importance: Callie reveals how little confidence she has in her own abilities as a healer's apprentice, hoping that Oscar will be able to help her to diagnose or perhaps suggest a treatment course for the children who are ailing.

When he (Caleb) gets back, you can tell him that someone's attacking us, and he needs to care more about the village and less about his wealth and fame.

-- Giles (chapter 11 paragraph 28)

Importance: Giles, who makes jam with his wife Mistress Eliza is frustrated that the only magician is absent when they need him most, especially as rumor has it that he is expanding his magical territory and not seeing to anything regarding the community he is sworn to protect and serve.

When you say the wrong thing, when you hurt someone, you tell them you are sorry.

-- Callie (chapter 12 paragraph 20)



Importance: Callie instructs Oscar as to how to properly respond to a person once you have upset them. She has taken it upon herself to educate Oscar in how to behave around people as he has no clue.

He (Master Caleb) did something terrible, but... he did good things too.
-- Oscar (chapter 13 paragraph 54)

Importance: Oscar tells the cats about their master's death and reminds them, and himself that while Master Caleb had made mistakes, he'd also done some good things as well, which included taking them all in.

But you're the only person who has seen the creature, and it's attacking us, and it killed Caleb, and so we need your help.
-- Master Thomas (chapter 14 paragraph 7)

Importance: Master Thomas knows that Oscar has no desire to relive what had happened, but he has no choice but to insist, even if it means being blunt about the degree of danger they are facing and the amount of damage it is capable of.

What kind of monster closes a haberdashery on a Saturday?
-- City Gentleman (chapter 15 paragraph 23)

Importance: This comment is made by a gentleman from the City and by the tone of the comment it is clear that he is completely out of touch with reality. Rather than explore what kind of monster it was or why it attacked, the gentleman can only consider how it inconveniences him personally.

If he (Caleb) had the power to turn wood into a child, do you think he wouldn't try to make as much money from it as he possibly could?
-- Callie (chapter 16 paragraph 8)

Importance: Callie is explaining to Oscar that with five wizard trees cut down, it is unlikely that Caleb made only one wooden child, and she reminds Oscar that with the City children, she'd always thought there was something missing, although she didn't get that feeling from him.

Come get me!
-- Oscar (chapter 17 paragraph 50)

Importance: Oscar is terribly afraid of the monster he has lured all the way to the plaguelands and while most of him wants to run home again, he realizes that it would only keep coming after Callie, and everyone else. He has no choice but to continue luring it further away to save those he cares about.

Don't ever do anything that stupid again without taking me with you.
-- Callie (chapter 18 paragraph 26)



Importance: Callie reveals the depth of her feelings for Oscar when she sends Lord Cooper after him and likely saves his life. She insists that he never try something that dangerous without her again.

The earth will keep bearing monsters as long as there's magic enough to let it.
-- Oscar (chapter 18 paragraph 5)

Importance: Oscar tells Callie that even though he managed to lead one earth monster into the sea, it didn't mean their problems were over. He knew that the earth could continue to spew monsters until it had nothing left, and the only way to fix things was to destroy it.