

The Night Circus Study Guide

The Night Circus by Erin Morgenstern

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Night Circus Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Anticipation, Part One: Primordium: Unexpected Post - False Pretenses.....	5
Part One: Primordium: Target Practice - Hidden Things.....	8
Part Two: Illumination: Opening Night I: Inception - Wishes and Desires.....	12
Part Two: Illumination: Atmosphere - The Wizard in the Tree.....	15
Part Two: Illumination: Temporary Places - Tête-à-Tête.....	19
Part Three: Intersections: The Lovers - Three Cups of Tea with Lainie Burgess.....	22
Part Three: Intersections: Stormy Seas - Beautiful Pain.....	25
Part Four: Incendiary: Technicalities - Pursuit.....	29
Part Four: Incendiary: Old Ghosts - The Second Lighting of the Bonfire.....	32
Part Five: Divination: Fates Foretold - Bons Reves.....	35
Characters.....	37
Objects/Places.....	42
Themes.....	45
Style.....	47
Quotes.....	50
Topics for Discussion.....	51



Plot Summary

The Night Circus is a story of an ancient dual between two schools of magical knowledge: old and new. During the course of the deadly game, two young illusionists fall in love, forever changing their lives and the lives of the performers in a mysterious traveling night circus.

In 1873, five-year-old Celia Bowen is deposited at the office of her magician father, Prospero the Entertainer, after her mother's unfortunate suicide. Although Prospero does not have any desire to parent a child, he is intrigued when it becomes clear that his daughter exhibits magical ability. Immediately, Prospero contacts his previous teacher, Mr. AH, and demands a dual: old magic versus new in a battle to the death. Accepting Prospero's wager, Mr. AH sets out to find his own pupil, an orphan named Marco Alisdar, whom he plucks from an orphanage and schools in the ways of old magic. When Marco is eighteen years old, he is sent to work as the assistant to Chandresh Christophe Lefevre, an eccentric yet brilliant man who creates the idea of traveling night circus. He hires Celia Bowen to work as an illusionist in the show, inadvertently creating a venue for the greatest battle magic has ever seen. Although they are unaware that the other is their opponent, every move that Marco and Celia make surrounding the circus is considered a "move" in their never-ending game of magical chess, in which one illusionist will emerge victorious and the other will have fought to the death.

Marco is the first to discover that Celia is his opponent, and when he is forced to leave the circus to work with Chandresh, Marco sends his girlfriend Isobel to work as a spy, sending him information about Celia's movement. What Marco doesn't know is that as soon as she arrives at the circus, Isobel performs a tempering spell, creating a sense of balance and harmony in the battle between Marco and Isobel. The two illusionists work tirelessly, always trying to out-imagine their opponent as they create mystifying and outrageous circus tents to impress the guests such as moving carousels with living animals, gardens constructed entirely out of ice, and winding labyrinths of clouds. As the competition intensifies, Marco and Celia realize that they are connected not only through their fierce competition, but also through their emotions. Although they try desperately to avoid it, both young illusionists realize that they are falling in love.

Unaware of the magical hold they have over the lives of the circus performers, who are truly just pawns in the venue of the competition, Marco and Isobel tread dangerously toward destruction as they allow their feelings for each other to cloud the competition. Celia, who literally holds the circus together with her thoughts, begins to waver in her control, and as a result, Tara Burgess, one of the circus' founding members, dies. On Halloween Night, 1902, Isobel discovers that Marco is in love with Celia, and in an act of revenge, destroys the tempering spell, tearing apart the delicate balance that had held the circus together for so many years. In this moment, a dangerous schism is created, allowing danger to enter the circus for the first time. Chandresh, drunk and confused, arrives at the circus on the same evening and kills Herr Friedrich Thiessen. This act of violence would never have been possible while the tempering act was still in place.



Celia, sensing that something has gone terribly wrong, scrambles to hold the circus together, to restore the balance that had once kept the circus safe. Overwhelmed with responsibility, and exhausted by the competition itself, Celia threatens to quit the competition all together, to throw herself in the fire so that Marco can live. At the last moment, however, Celia discovers a way to dissipate her atoms and pull them back together using the circus bonfire as a touchstone. She will be forced to haunt the physical world rather than live within it, but for her, the reward is far greater than the loss. Grabbing Marco and jumping with him into the fire, Celia ultimately finds a way to avoid the terrible fate of the competition. In a way, she and Marco simultaneously withdraw from competition and enter a dream world together. Although they can never interact with the physical world again, they are together, and will enjoy the circus together for as long as their souls wander the earth for their own magical "happily ever after."



Anticipation, Part One: Primordium: Unexpected Post - False Pretenses

Summary

"Anticipation" describes the excitement one feels when waiting in line for the mysterious Night Circus to open. Written in second person, the narrator speaks directly to the reader, drawing out their excitement for the story. The circus is described in monochromatic detail, all black, white, and grey. This circus is special because it opens at nightfall and closes at dawn.

In "Unexpected Post," the magician billed as Prospero the Entertainer learns that a five-year-old girl has been dropped off at the theatre with a note pinned to her jacket. As soon as Prospero sets eyes on the girl, he knows that she is his daughter. When he complains that her name, Celia, isn't suitable for a magician's daughter, the girl grows angry and teacup in the room shatters. Prospero looks at Celia with interest as she magics the teacup back together.

A few months later, a man in a grey suit comes to watch Prospero's magic show. After, the man in grey meets Prospero in his dressing room and witnesses Celia perform a few magic tricks. Prospero is positively gleeful as he watches Celia perform, and when she is finished, he asks the man in grey if he'd like to play. The man in grey will find a suitable child of his own to train in magic, and one day sometime in the future, the two illusionists will dual. Although the reward isn't revealed, it is very clear that the two will battle at high stakes. When the man in grey accepts, he slips a gold ring in Celia's finger that burns into her skin, marking her with a scar. Prospero claims to have found the perfect venue for the future dual, a project of Chandresh Christophe Lefevre.

Soon after, the man in grey visits an orphanage in London to find a child. He meets with four children but it is only the last, a boy, who interests him. The boy is nine-years-old and the man in grey has no desire to learn his name. He takes the boy home and spends the next five years teaching him magic. During his training, the boy is never allowed to leave the home alone and is never allowed to interact with other people. Even his food is deposited through a slot in the door. When the boy is a teenager, the man in grey takes him to a magic show in France to watch Prospero perform. Immediately, the boy recognizes that Prospero uses real magic disguised as slight-of-hand to win over his audience. There is no way Prospero's "tricks" could be performed without real magic.

Just before the boy turns nineteen, the man in grey suddenly moves him into his own townhouse in London. Since the boy has never been allowed to interact with the public, the bustling London streets overwhelm him. He spends days wandering the crowds, sketching trees in his notebooks. One afternoon, he loses a notebook and a beautiful young woman named Isobel Martin returns it. Isobel is a tarot card reader, and the two



bond over their mutual love of the supernatural. When the boy feels that he can trust Isobel, he shows her his greatest trick: he can manipulate minds. When he lays his hands on Isobel, the world around her begins to whirl and suddenly, she is standing in the middle of a sunny forest even though she had been on a rainy London street only moments before. The boy reveals his real name: Marco Alisdair. Soon after, Isobel moves in and Marco reveals that he can also read minds.

Meanwhile, Prospero has retired from magic and has employed Celia fulltime as a medium. She despises the work because it gives the sad sops who pay to speak with their deceased loved ones false hope: spirits have much better things to do than throw teacups around the room and whisper through billowing curtains. Prospero's training has also become quite dark. He spends afternoons slitting open Celia's fingers so she can magically repair them, and after an argument about whether she should continue her medium work, he smashes her wrist with a paperweight, shattering the bone. Around the same time, the man in grey tells Marco that he is to begin working for Chandresh Christophe Lefevre, but he doesn't explain why.

Analysis

From childhood, Marco Alisdair and Celia Bowen are inextricably linked. They both exhibited special skills as children that their teachers were drawn to and found suitable for battle. The competition is simple: two illusionists representing two different schools of magic will compete to determine which school is superior. As a student himself, Prospero the Entertainer had studied under Mr. AH, but at some point in his schooling, their theologies about magic parted. Mr. AH represents the idea that magic can be taught, like any school subject, while Prospero represents the idea that magic is in one's blood: those who are born with magic are naturally superior to those who are taught magic. Many years ago, these two magicians decided to settle their dispute through battle. Each would select a student to mentor and eventually the students would battle to prove which was superior. It is not revealed until the end of the novel that this is a battle to the death, so the reader is unaware that Prospero has selfishly entered his only child, Celia, into a competition that could cost Celia her life, to preserve his own pride. During their discussion, it is revealed that Prospero has lost the last seven battles - his past seven students have died - making his wager with Celia's life even more harrowing.

When the students are selected, they are each given a silver ring, which burns its way into their skin, scarring them so deeply that not even magic can remove the bond. With this binding spell, the two young illusionists are forever linked so that each decision, action, and spell one creates directly affects the other, although they are unaware of their competitor's identity. It's interesting to note that there don't seem to be any rules to the competition, and both the competitors and the reader are confused by its nature. Neither teacher, Mr. AH nor Prospero, communicates to the student when the actual battle begins, how it can be won, or when it will end. They simply train their students in their school of magic and leave them to puzzle out the rest. Immediately, it becomes clear that Prospero is a disturbed teacher. He focuses Celia's training on two elements of magic: speaking to the dead and repairing physical damage. Even as a child, Celia



was able to repair broken cups and plates, but Prospero pushes her further, slitting her fingertips open one-by-one and breaking her bones so that she can repair them. Later in the novel, Celia's ability to "pull herself together" will be critical to her survival in the circus.

Meanwhile, Marco's study focuses heavily on his ability to manipulate people's minds. Somehow, Marco is able to transport people through his own imagination. When he meets Isobel, he showcases his magic by imaginatively transporting her from a rainy London street to a sunny forest, even though they never physically leave London. Throughout the novel, the two illusionist's powers are described abstractly. Neither's abilities are explicitly stated, which may leave some readers confused. However, it is safe to assume that Celia's powers are mostly physical while Marco's powers are mostly mental.

Vocabulary

Luminous, Adamant, Exorbitant, Manipulation, Frivolous, Innate, Nomenclature, Negligible, Deviation, Palpable, Glyph, Traverse, Imposition, Famished, Talisman, Alchemical, Divination, Admonish, Alcove, Sporadic, Insubstantial, Waif, Slather, Maneuver



Part One: Primordium: Target Practice - Hidden Things

Summary

Chandresh Christophe Lefevre throws darts at a recent theatre review pinned to a dartboard. Chandresh is a perfectionist theatre producer angered by the reviewer's assertion that his recent production was "almost transcendent." Although the review is glowing, Chandresh wants to be completely "transcendental" and views anything less as a failure.

In 1897, the Night Circus visits Concord, Massachusetts. Young Bailey plays Truth of Dare with his sister, Caroline, and their friends. Caroline dares Bailey to break into the Night Circus and bring something back with him as proof. Not wanting to look scared in front of Caroline's friends, Bailey accepts the dare and walks bravely toward the Night Circus. It is nearly deserted when Bailey arrives (it is daytime), and he has little trouble wriggling through the perimeter fence. The circus is eerily empty, and Bailey thinks it looks almost nothing like the circus he had visited the night before. Without the magic of the crowds, the performers, the sights and smells, the circus is little more than a gathering of tents. As he wanders through the tents, Bailey suddenly finds himself face-to-face with a redheaded girl. Immediately, the girl chides him for being where he does not belong, and then grabs his hand, presumably to lead him to safety. She pushes him back through the fence warning that if he's caught trespassing on circus grounds, there will be a terrible price to pay. When Bailey objects that he must bring something back with him, the redheaded girl gives him one of her white gloves. He thanks her and she smiles and says, "You're welcome, Bailey," even though he never told her his name.

Two years earlier, in 1895, the Night Circus is still a figment of Chandresh Christophe Lefevre's imagination. He throws lavish dinner midnight dinner parties and invites only the most innovative and influential artists to help him formulate plans for his next big production. He regularly invites Mme. Ana Padva, a retired Russian prima ballerina, to dine with him, as well as Mr. Ethan W. Barris, an engineer / architect. He also invites the creative Burgess sisters, and his assistant Marco is always there to ensure the nights run smoothly. At the very first midnight dinner, Chandresh announces his grand plans to open a circus unlike any circus the world has seen. The dinner party erupts into creative brainstorming as everyone offers up their thoughts.

At one dinner party a few months later, a surprising guest rings the bell during dinner. It is a beautiful Japanese woman who seems to have arrived uninvited. She introduces herself as Tsukiko and walks boldly into the dining room. As Marco takes Tsukiko's coat, he is astounded by the large tattoo that snakes across her skin. When she catches him staring, Tsukiko simply says, "It is part of who I was, who I am, and who I will be" (p. 83). As the rest of the dinner guests enjoy their elegant courses, Tsukiko commandingly takes the room and begins her contortionist routine. She is stunning, as graceful as a



ballerina and as flexible as any acrobat the committee has ever seen. Suddenly, Chandresh bursts into applause and shouts that Tsukiko is exactly what he's been looking for. Tsukiko smiles, leaves her card, and soon after becomes a fixture of the midnight dinners. Only Mr. Barris is missing from Tsukiko's first dinner because he is in Munich hiring a world-renown clockmaker to undertake a project for the circus. The only description he gives about Chandresh's vision is that he would like something "dreamlike." The clockmaker, Herr Thiessen, takes several months to build the perfect clock, completely unique from anything anyone has ever seen before, and it is the perfect fit for the new circus.

Meanwhile, newspapers have printed that Prospero the Entertainer has died in his home of a heart attack. Celia, however, can still see her father's ghost and communicate with him as if he were still alive. Mixed in with the many letters of condolence is a grey envelope that only reads, "Your move" (p. 80). Celia shows her father, who bursts out into laughter, and knows that the man in grey's apprentice is ready for the dual. One year later, Celia sits in an audition room in London waiting to showcase her skills to a new circus owner. The rest of the illusionists in the waiting room look at Celia with confusion and disdain, but she pays them no mind. When she is finally called in for her audition, Chandresh tries to dismiss her, saying that he is looking for an illusionist, not a female assistance. He only allows her to audition when he hears that she is Prospero the Entertainer's daughter. Celia whips off her jacket, throws it into the air, and smirks as it becomes a black raven circling over the awed crowd. She snatches the notebook from Marco's hand, throws it into the air, and it becomes a flock of white doves. Everyone is impressed with Celia's magic and she is hired immediately. When Marco gets home that evening, he is shaking. He tells Isobel that he knows Celia is his opponent. He doesn't yet understand how they will dual, but it's clear that the circus will be their arena. Isobel vows to get a job reading tarot cards with the circus so she can spy on Celia and send information back to Marco in London.

This section ends by returning to young Bailey, now in 1902. He has been arguing with his father: Bailey wants to go to college and his father wants him to take over the family farm. Depressed after their latest conflict, Bailey walks outside and is shocked to see the Night Circus once again in the distance.

Analysis

At the opening of this section, Chandresh Lefevre is portrayed as a quirky yet brilliant perfectionist searching for a "transcendental" artistic expression. Together with his friends, he conceives a mysterious traveling circus. Keen readers will recall that in the previous section, which takes place a year before his first midnight dinner, Prospero visited Chandresh and planted the idea of a circus, signaling to the reader that Prospero has some control over Chandresh's thoughts and plans. Later in the novel, it will be revealed that Mr. AH has serious concerns about using a circus as the venue for the illusionist' competition, but Prospero, who is a great deal more reckless than Mr. AH, believes a circus creates more opportunity for the illusionists to use their imaginations: the key to unlocking their magical potential. The contortionist, Tsukiko arrives



unexpectedly and uninvited to one of Chandresh's midnight parties. Although it's not explicitly stated, it's possible that Prospero alerted Tsukiko to the parties and Chandresh's plans in the hopes that she could help Celia win the competition. Later in the novel, it is revealed that Tsukiko was once one of Mr. AH's students, which would explain her interest in the new competition. Prospero is not the only character with a spy. When Marco realizes that Celia is his opponent, he asks Isobel, a tarot card reader, to join the circus and send updates back to him on Celia's behaviors. It's still unclear to both players what the rules of the dual are, but Marco wants to be prepared after witnessing the phenomenal magic skills Celia possesses.

This section also introduced twelve-year-old Bailey. It's clear to the reader from this first scene that Bailey doesn't fit in with his family. His sister, Caroline, torments him, daring him to enter the circus during daytime despite the warning signs. Bailey is depicted as an outcast, like many others involved in the circus. What's interesting about his interaction with the circus is that Poppet, one of the Murray twins, is the only performer to see Bailey on the circus grounds, and seems to know who he is before he introduces himself. This showcases Poppet's powers, although the reader hasn't yet been introduced to her interesting birth. Before Bailey leaves, Poppet gives him one of her white gloves, a personal object. Throughout the novel, many characters give away personal objects, and it becomes clear that these objects bind the giver and receiver together. Although it's clear that Poppet and Bailey have made an emotional connection, this glove also gives them a physical connection.

In this section, word spreads that Prospero the Entertainer has died, although it's clear to the reader that he is still alive, just living in an altered state: "Where the sunlight hits him, he is all but invisible. Part of a shoulder appears to be missing, the top of his head vanishes in a flutter of sun-caught dust. The rest of him is transparent, like a reflection in glass" (p. 80). This scene hints at one of the most difficult ideas in the novel to grasp: displaced atoms. Prospero has found a way to disperse his atoms, spreading them throughout space, allowing himself to be in many places at once. When he wants to return to the physical world, he pulls himself back together the same way he taught Celia to pull together the pieces of broken teacups, or in more extreme cases, her physical self. The problem, although it hasn't been revealed yet, is that Prospero got greedy with his skill and started dispersing his atoms further and further into space, making it impossible to call them all back again. Now, he is doomed to live the life of a ghost, haunting the places where most of his atoms have collected. This makes it impossible for him to continue performing and therefore, he has released a statement that he is dead.

Vocabulary

Ornate, Transcendent, Posterity, Coerce, Enchant, Conviction, Exsanguination, Ethereal, Enigma, Foyer, Nocturnal, Palate, Delectable, Sumptuous, Ambiance, Fiend, Aesthetics, Symposium, Inscrutable, Inception, Panache, Erroneous, Missive, Mar, Amalgam, Enthuse, Cryptic, Consummate, Beatific, Kismet, Resplendent, Harlequin,



Ingenuity, Conspicuous, Semblance, Flounce, Proscenium, Pontificate, Predilection,
Haphazard, Emanate, Innocuous, Interim, Dictate, Valiant, Mundane, Quartz



Part Two: Illumination: Opening Night I: Inception - Wishes and Desires

Summary

It is the Night Circus' opening night in London, 1886. The chapter opens with long descriptions of the circus' opulent decorations and structures, engaging each of the reader's five senses. The most spectacular of the opening ceremonies is the lighting of the bonfire, in which twelve archers release arrows on each of the twelve midnight chimes. Each arrow erupts a level of the bonfire into another color so that by midnight, the bonfire has changed colors twelve times. While this is happening, the wildcat tamer's wife is in labor with twins. She gives birth to Winston Aiden Murray six minutes before midnight, and Penelope Aislin Murray seven minutes after. Chandresh is disappointed to hear that the twins are fraternal rather than identical (which he could have found many circus jobs for), but is amused to hear that the twins both have bright red hair. Almost as soon as they are born, the twins earn the nicknames Poppet (Penelope) and Widget (Winston).

During the lighting of the bonfire, Marco sneaks down and, when no one is looking, tosses one of his notebooks into the fire. Celia, who has been helping with the twins since their delivery a few minutes before, feels a sudden chill rush through her body. She knows that her opponent, whoever he is, has just played a move. The narration then jumps to the Burgess sister's point of view during the lighting of the bonfire. In the moments before the first archer released his arrow, Chandresh feels weak, as though he might faint. Marco rushes over and quickly guides Chandresh away, making the Burgess sisters suspicious that he is hiding something.

Shifting ahead in time to 1902, when Bailey has seen the Night Circus on the horizon for the second time, Bailey rushes his farm chores so he can spend the evening at the circus searching for the redheaded girl. Bailey is almost afraid to enter the circus, fearing that it can't possibly live up to his memories, but it is more spectacular than he remembers. He winds through the various tents, stopping occasionally to watch performers, like Tsukiko and Celia, before stopping in front of a frozen woman. At first Bailey thinks it is a statue, but he notices minute movements, almost imperceptible to the human eye. The frozen woman is flanked by a sign that says, "In Memoriam," although the sign does not indicate who is being memorialized.

Returning to 1887, Celia questions her father about the identity of her opponent. Although Prospero has a theory of who he is, he won't share his thoughts with Celia, claiming that it shouldn't matter who her opponent is; she should simply want to do her best. She doesn't understand how anything she's doing can be judged, but again, Prospero tells her that her opinions aren't important. Soon after, Celia becomes entranced with a new tent at the circus, the Ice Garden, and instinctually she knows that her opponent has created it. Meanwhile, Marco receives letters from Isobel about



Celia's activities, although the letters don't contain any of the real information Marco wants to know, and he begins to resent Isobel for her incompetence.

Three years later, in 1890, Celia has been spending a lot of time with Widget and Poppet. One afternoon, she discovers that the four-year-olds have special powers. Poppet is able to see into the future and Widget is able to read people's pasts. She makes Poppet promise to tell her if she sees anything in the stars that might be important, and in return, she vows to teach the twins magic the same way her own father taught her.

Analysis

The circus finally opens after the first 120 pages of the novel. The opening ceremony begins with the lighting of the bonfire. While the spectacular event is described in dramatic detail, Marco quietly drops one of his leather-bound notebooks into the fire. At the time, this action isn't given much attention in the text, but as the novel progresses, it will become clear that Marco has "bound" himself to the circus through this physical object. As long as the fire burns, Marco will draw energy from the fire to "make his moves" in the competition. Just as Bailey is physically connected to Poppet through her white glove, Marco is physically connected to the circus and, in a way, Celia. Marco is also bound to Celia through their silver rings (which have burned forever into the skin), but it is still important for him to remain connected to the circus as it travels around the world. The writing in the notebook is hieroglyphic and resembles the branches of a tree. Keen readers will remember that Tsukiko's tattoo was described in the same way, symbolizing to the reader before it is revealed, that Tsukiko and Marco are similar having both studied under Mr. AH. Trees will also become an important symbol for longevity and magic in the novel. It is interesting to note that Burgess sisters feel uneasy when they watch Marco lead Chandresh away from the bonfire after the lighting. Although it is a small moment, it signals to the reader that the Burgess sisters will question the strange goings-on in the circus, and that there may be something sinister in Marco's relationship with his boss.

During the opening ceremony, the cat trainer, Mrs. Murray, goes into labor her twins, Poppet and Widget. Time plays an interesting role in the novel, particularly in the way that it affects the circus performers. Time is most directly symbolized in the clock Herr Thiessen builds for the courtyard. At first glance, it just looks like a beautiful black clock with a white face and silver pendulum, but when it is wound, it takes on a life of its own. Slowly, its face falls away like puzzle pieces, and morphs from white to grey to black. It is described as "dreamlike," illuminating the circus' theme of creating a "dream world" where visitors walk at night. Because the twins were born a few minutes before and a few minutes after midnight on the magical night of the circus opening, it should be no surprise that the imaginative environment gifts them with magical ability: Penelope (Poppet) is born seven minutes after midnight, and as a result, is gifted with the ability to see into the future while her twin brother Winston (Widget), born six minutes before midnight, is able to see into the past. Being able to see into the future would explain



how Poppet knows Bailey's name before he arrives, and signals to the reader that Poppet knows what is going to happen to Bailey even before their first meeting.

This section begins to wind time around itself, jumping backward and forward in time, which can be confusing and disorienting for the reader. Some critics argue that the novel is unnecessarily complicated, and that a traditional structure would have served the story just as well, if not better. Others argue that the fragmented structure is critical to Morgenstern's representation of history and time as cyclic. There is no sense of time within dreams, and therefore this must be reflected in the circus' constructed dream world. The theme must also, then, be highlighting within the novel's structure, referencing the way past, present, and future are intertwined. Students should be encouraged to remember Morgenstern's theme of time being cyclic and intertwined while suffering through the confusing structure. Each chapter is time-stamped for clarity, and confused students should be encouraged to construct a timeline of events to orient themselves through the novel.

Vocabulary

Coalesce, Permeate, Penultimate, Travesty, Auspicious, Ostensible, Dubious, Surreptitious, Impending, Retaliate, Predominate, Faux Pas, Knell, Modicum, Vantage, Influx, Admonish, Wane, Tedious, Undulate, Sconce, Apparition, Derisive, Addendum, Adamant, Monochromatic, Besotted, Rampant, Perceptible



Part Two: Illumination: Atmosphere - The Wizard in the Tree

Summary

Tsukiko knocks on Celia's door and invites her to a dinner party when the circus arrives in London. Celia agrees to join Tsukiko at a midnight dinner, although she initially protests. Celia's arrival and Chandresh's home is a surprise to everyone, but she is welcomed warmly. All of the dinner guests converse about their plans for the circus, but Celia is distracted by her father's spirit haunting her. She engages in mild flirtation with Chandresh' assistant, Marco Alisdair, and notes that Tara Burgess seems particularly bothered throughout the dinner. At one moment, her discussion is lively and engaged, but the next, she is withdrawn and sullen.

In 1891, when the circus is just beginning, Herr Thiessen receives a business card with a date and time stamped on it. It is clearly the destination of the circus, although this information is meant to be strictly confidential. Herr Thiessen arrives in Dresden and thoroughly enjoys the event. He attends the circus every night, and while he waits for the circus to open at nightfall, often spends time with fellow circus-goers sharing stories about the mysterious traveling circus. Eventually, Herr Thiessen begins writing about the circus, publishing articles in newspapers around the world, all of which gather more diehard circus fans who travel from far and wide not only to see the circus, but also to meet the man who has written so beautifully about it. The traveling fans, known as Reveurs, dress in all black with a splash of red, usually in the form of a necktie or scarf, to better identify each other from city to city. Herr Thiessen receives thousands of letters from Reveurs, but he is still shocked when Celia Bowen begins writing to him.

In 1893, Marco visits Mr. Barris, the engineer to helps build many of the circus tents. Marco needs help building a particularly complicated tent, and he reveals to Mr. Barris that he is Celia's opponent. Mr. Barris had suspected, but is honored that Marco would trust him enough to reveal the truth of his position. A few weeks later, a new tent, an ice garden with falling snow, is added to the circus. The first time she sees it Celia falls in love, and knows that her opponent must be responsible for it. Immediately, she sends a note to Mr. Barris asking if she can make additions to it. Slowly, the two opponents, who have not yet met as rivals, add onto the increasingly beautiful tent, showcasing their best magic and their broadest imaginations. Prospero visits his daughter to condemn the partnership, but Celia will not be moved from her new project. Marco is just as enthralled with the project: "He composes chambers that lead into others that Celia had created. Stairs that wind around her halls. Leaving spaces open for her to respond" (p. 190).

Shortly after, in 1894, Tara Burgess arrives unexpectedly at Mr. Barris' office. She wants to speak with him about the changes in the circus. After a long, winding, and ultimately flirtatious conversation, Tara comes out with her real reason for the visit: she has



noticed that since the opening of the circus, no one involved (except for the twins Poppet and Widget) have aged a day. Mr. Barris, although he may know more than he is leading on, suggests that Tara visit the man in grey. Meanwhile, during storm that shuts down the circus for the night, Celia visits with Isobel and asks to have her tarot cards read. Immediately, Celia notices that Isobel's deck is missing one card. Isobel is clearly rattled and makes a weak excuse for the card's absence. The reading continues, and Isobel becomes increasingly distressed. She can clearly see the battle in the cards, yet she does not know how to describe it. Of course Celia doesn't need an explanation - she understands the cards completely - so she politely excuses herself. When Celia leaves, Marco Alisdair stops her on the street. He comments that Celia must have accidentally left with his umbrella. In a flash, Celia suddenly recognizes that Marco is her opponent. She is shocked and amused with herself for never even considering him.

In 1902, Bailey returns to the circus to have his tarot cards read. Once again, the cards confuse Isobel, but she sees great responsibility and travel in Bailey's future. She also sees that Bailey has not just come for a glimpse into his future, but because he's searching for Poppet. With a smile, she sends Bailey on his way to find the redheaded girl.

In 1894, Poppet is telling Widget about a strange vision she's been having, over and over, yet she can't understand it. The first part of the vision is that they'll be having company. The second part, which doesn't make any sense, is that they will meet a man with no shadow and that there will be something red spilled like paint on the ground.

Analysis

In this section, Tara Burgess continues to question circus reality. When the circus has been traveling for eight years, she questions why no one, aside from the Murray twins, seems to have aged. None of the circus performers is aware that their entire arena has been constructed as a venue for Marco and Celia's competition. Interestingly, Tara assumes that Herr Thiessen's clock has somehow cast a spell over the circus, slowing down time. Tara has begun to question the reality of the circus world, and she doesn't yet realize that she has put herself in perilous danger. It's unclear why Prospero and Mr. AH should be so protective of their students and the arena, but it's clear that no one actively involved in the competition is allowed to speak of it, perhaps because one of the main rules of the competition is that there is to be no interference: one illusionist is prohibited from interfering with the other's work, and neither are allowed to call on outside forces to aid their battle. Neither Marco nor Celia is allowed to reveal the true nature of the circus to the performers for fear that they would choose sides and nullify the secret agreement between Prospero and Mr. AH. This is an isolating, controlling decision that likely won't make sense to readers. If readers are going to fully engage in the novel, however, they must agree to follow the rules and remain in the dark, just like the pupils. For readers who like to remain in control of a story, this aspect of the novel will be torturous, but for readers able to be swept away in imagination, this novel will read like a dream, which is exactly what Morgenstern intended.



Despite the rules against interference, both Celia and Marco reach out to Mr. Barris, the circus' chief engineer. Together, they work in tandem to create the many rooms of the ice garden. Technically, the two are not interfering with each other's work, they are creating in tandem, which isn't explicitly against the rules, although neither teacher is thrilled with the collaboration: "This is abhorrent...you are meant to be working separately, not in this...this debauched juxtaposition. I have warned you about collaborating, it is not the proper way to exhibit your skills" (p. 189). Nevertheless, Celia falls in love with Marco's work before she ever meets him, so when she finally does meet Marco as her opponent and begins to develop feelings for him (he is described as very handsome), it is already clear that she has fallen in love with Marco's mind. And from the way Marco stares at Celia at the midnight dinners, it's also clear that Marco is developing romantic feelings for her (although his feelings seem more carnal in nature). Later in the novel, it is hinted at that Celia also has feelings for Herr Thiessen, which likely stems from her letters to him, which are seen in this section. Celia is drawn to Herr Thiessen's devotion to and admiration for the circus. Through his letters, Celia is able to see the circus through the eyes of a fan, not the eyes of a performer forced into circus servitude. Through her relationship with Herr Thiessen, Celia realizes the circus' value and the joy it brings to people's lives. Perhaps because of this, Celia begins to view the circus with new respect and a new determination to preserve the innocence and happiness associated with it. It may also be that Celia has found a father figure in Herr Thiessen and that her feelings for him are not romantic. It's clear that Herr Thiessen admires the circus and Celia's role (as a performer) in it, and his words of encouragement and pride must be some of the first Celia has ever heard.

Also in this section, Isobel reads tarot cards for both Celia and Bailey, neither of which she understands. Even though Isobel is aware of the competition, something about Celia's cards and their description of the battle beguiles her. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Isobel is living in denial. At this point, the circus has been traveling for years yet there is no mention of her continued romantic relationship with Marco. It appears, however, that Isobel is still in love with Marco, and perhaps believes that he still loves her, despite their breakdown in communication and the obvious assumption that Marco is withholding information from her. Celia's cards likely confuse Isobel because she does not want to acknowledge the pain that is coming her way. Isobel isn't the only character with the ability to see into the future. When Poppet is eight years old, she begins having a strange vision over and over. The first part, that they will have a visitor, is clearly foreshadowing for Bailey's surprise first circus visit, when Poppet gives him her glove (Poppet has her vision in 1894 and Bailey doesn't first visit the circus until three years later). The second part, however, is more confusing, although it's clear that she's having a vision of someone's death. Poppet's words and visions often act as foreshadowing, and it's clear that someone, perhaps soon, is going to die.

It's interesting to note that when Widget tries to calm Poppet's nerves after she's had a particularly disturbing vision, he often tells her stories. Today, he tells her the story of the greatest wizard in the world who made a mistake one day by telling a young, beautiful girl the secret to his abilities: "if the girl had not been beautiful and clever, she would have been easier to resist, and then there would be no story at all" (p. 223). After the girl learned the great wizard's secrets, she turned him into a tree, trapping him for all



eternity. Eventually, the girl grew old and died, taking the magic with her, but the wizard, whose tree thrived and grew became immortal: "He was part of the leaves and the bark and the sap, and part of the acorns that were carried away by squirrels to become new oak trees in other places. And when those trees grew, he was in those branches and leaves and roots as well" (p. 225). There are many symbols in this story yet it's unclear who stands for what. Is Widget alluding that Celia is the young girl who will trick Marco into revealing his secrets, or is he alluding that Prospero and Mr. AH are like the great wizard, seeking immortality through their young pupils? Either way, at the end of the story, Poppet's words once again act as foreshadowing when she asks, "Is it not that bad to be trapped somewhere, then? Depending on where you're trapped?" Widget answers, "I suppose it depends on how much you like the place you're trapped in...and how much you like whoever you're stuck there with" (p. 226). Students should be encouraged to return to this section after the novel has reached its conclusion to discuss the deeper meaning to be found in this story.

Vocabulary

Taut, Evocative, Countenance, Matriarch, Cacophony, Opulent, Gargantuan, Ardent, Imitable, Aficionado, Pontificate, Gratis, Bedlam, Vehement, Abhorrent, Debauched, Juxtaposition, Mercurial, Rogue, Innate, Harried, Bohemian, Buoyant, Vestibule, Acute, Compatriot, Discern, Berate, Carmine, Coerce, Levitate



Part Two: Illumination: Temporary Places - Tête-à-Tête

Summary

Tara Burgess follows the address on the business card Mr. Barris gave her to the hotel where the man in grey is staying. When she meets with him, Tara attempts to voice her concerns about the circus and its strange effects, but as she speaks, it appears as if the man in grey is clearing her mind, so she doesn't remember why she's there or what she wanted to ask him. They walk together to the train to send Tara back into town, but when they part ways, Tara keeps walking, straight off the platform and onto the tracks. The oncoming train kills her instantly. At Tara's funeral, many of the circus performers discuss the tragic nature of her accident. Tsukiko points out that it couldn't have been an accident at all. Since the circus began, not a single performer has had an injury, an illness, even a cold. She argues that no one has been able to see this strangeness because they're too embroiled in it: it's a part of their everyday existence: "Perhaps the late Miss Burgess was close enough to the edge that she could see it differently" (p. 243). Tsukiko worries that whatever spell is surrounding the circus is beginning to crack. She asks Isobel if she's "tempering" but Isobel doesn't think her tiny spell is doing anything to help the circus survive.

After his meeting with the fortuneteller, Bailey follows her directions and walks straight into Poppet and Widget's show. Poppet greets him with a warm smile of recognition, although Bailey had worried that she wouldn't recognize him. When her show concludes, she takes Bailey to all the best snack tents for free refreshments, delighted to have him as company. Bravely, Bailey asks how she knew his name the first time he came to the circus, and Poppet answers honestly: she can see into the future. Although she can't see exact events before they occur, she gets strong feelings about things. She suggests that they ride on the stargazer together, maybe she'll have an inkling of what is to come in the future. Bailey readily agrees. Although they board the ride full of excitement and laughter, when the vision comes, Poppet nearly screams out in pain. The vision was very bright and blitzed through her head as if it might crack her skull in two. To cheer her up, Bailey and Widget take her to the cloud maze, a beautiful tent full of clouds that form a labyrinth around the visitors. They have a wonderful time together, enjoying many different tents, and when it's time for Bailey to go, Poppet gives him a card for free admission, so he can come back again tomorrow. When he turns to go, Poppet leans in and kisses him on the cheek.

In 1896, at a dinner part at Chandresh's house, Marco cannot keep his eyes of Celia. When the party is over, Marco pulls her aside and asks if she would have a drink with him. With the house empty, Celia cannot bring herself to say no. The two speak openly about their pasts: Celia's father, Prospero, and how he abandoned her mother. Marco tells Celia about the orphanage, and the seemingly random way that Mr. AH, the man in grey, plucked him out of it to study magic. He shows Celia how he has mastered the art



of manipulation, letting his perfect, chiseled face fall away and reveal his true face: far less striking, but still handsome. Celia recognizes this face because Marco has come to see her show many times wearing it. With a new sense of trust between them, Marco offers Celia a tour of Chandresh's house. The two discuss the fact that they are opponents, and wonder how and when the rivalry will come to an end. As a game, they take turns manipulating a single card: the two of hearts, showing off their skills. When Celia stabs her hand with a dagger, dripping blood over the card, Marco finally admits that she clearly has the most skill. It's clear to him, then, that the point of the battle is two schools of magic pitted against each other: reading versus practice. The two spend the next few hours together, wandering the house and talking openly with each other, the way they never have spoken with anyone before. Many things are revealed: Marco uses the bonfire as a touchstone so that he will always be connected to the circus, even when it is far away. Prospero is not dead, but living in an in-between world, like a ghost, due to his failed experiments with invincibility. And there is a strong physical connection between the two magicians. When Marco accidentally brushes his hand against Celia's the lights in the room begin to flicker, and the two feel the touch through their entire bodies.

Analysis

Tara Burgess' death comes as a surprise to the reader and to the circus performers. At the funeral, Tsukiko points out that since the circus opened, none of the performers has even had a cold, suggesting that magic is keeping everyone safe. Tara's death means that whatever spell has been holding the circus together is beginning to crack, which is dangerous for everyone. She asks Isobel if she has been "tempering," which isn't fully explained until later in the novel. When the circus opened, Isobel performed a spell to bring balance. She bound personal objects from Marco and Celia together with the tarot card Temperance. Tsukiko fears that if Isobel's spell is slipping, the entire circus could be in danger. For her part, Isobel doesn't believe that she, as a relatively insignificant performer, has the magical capability of affected circus dynamic. Isobel embodies the analogy that "there are no small parts, only small players," which she will fully come to understand in the next section. Nevertheless, it is becoming clear to the circus performers that someone, or something, is holding everyone together and keeping them safe. In the scene of Tara Burgess' death, it's unclear whether Mr. AH is responsible for pushing Tara onto the tracks (he was on a different platform and never physically touched her) or if perhaps he removed whatever spell was protecting Tara and the rest of the performers. Regardless of what happened, it's clear that Mr. AH is a dark, complicated character and unfortunately for the reader, many of these questions are left unanswered. Throughout the novel, Morgenstern raises a variety of questions that are never truly answered. In scenes like this, it's up to the reader to use their imagination and decide for themselves what actually happened.

After Tsukiko brought Celia to her first midnight dinner, Celia becomes a staple at the parties whenever the circus is in London. There, she begins to spend more time with Marco and on this particular night, they spend time together alone for the first time. Although the two young illusionists are competitors, they are both desperate to discuss



the competition with someone who understands it. So rather than guarding their secrets, the two speak frankly and openly with each other trying to puzzle out the competitions rules and judging system. They don't get very far as neither has more understanding of their strange dual than the other, except to say that it's clear that two schools of magic, old and new, are being tested side-by-side. Through these conversations, Marco and Celia's characters are developed and the stage is set for the two to fall in love. They were bound together in competition many years ago, but now they find that they are bonding through emotion and understanding, first becoming friends who admire each other's handiwork and later through the romantic feelings forming between them. When the two schools of magic come together physically, through their physical touch, for example, the power is so magnanimous that it shakes the walls and flickers the lights. It's clear that Morgenstern is working hard to convince her readers that the passion between the two magicians is unbridled, wild, and powerful.

In 1902, when Bailey returns to the circus to find Poppet after five years of being apart. When they are reunited, it is as if no time has passed and Poppet greets Bailey like an old friend, as if she had been expecting him, once again signaling to the reader that Bailey seems to have a much larger role to play in the circus than merely as a fan. When the two ride on the stargazer together, Poppet's confusion vision (of the dead man soaked in blood) returns stronger than ever, suggesting that the event is only moments away.

Vocabulary

Construe, Apparition, Traverse, Planetary, Melancholy, Quip, Automaton, Pinnacle, Incognito, Ambience, Amicable, Imposition, Firmament, Iridescent, Diaphanous, Proprietor, Lapis, Brocade, Brevity, Clandestine, Enigma, Armament, Hilt, Antagonistic, Rudimentary, Trellis, Stimulus, Tawdry, Camaraderie



Part Three: Intersections: The Lovers - Three Cups of Tea with Lainie Burgess

Summary

In 1899, a thirteen-year anniversary of the circus party is held at Chandresh's home. Going against the monochromatic color scheme of the circus, Chandresh's party is overwhelmed with color. Only Mr. AH arrives in his customary grey suit. Herr Thiessen wears all red with a splash of black, a reversal of his regular attire. Isobel spends the entire evening trying to catch Marco's attention, but it's clear that he only has eyes for Celia. He says that it is killing him that he cannot ask her to dance, and when he sees her walking unaccompanied in the hallway, he grabs her hand and pulls her into an empty room. The two spend a few moments canoodling before Mr. AH abruptly interrupts them. Celia quickly slips out of the room, and Mr. AH confronts Marco about his behavior. He finds the flirtation with Celia completely inappropriate. During the argument, Marco finally admits that he is in love with her. A look of genuine sadness crosses Mr. AH's face when he says, "I am sorry to hear that....It will make the challenge a great deal more difficult for you" (p. 302). It is the first time that anything Marco has said or done has elicited a response from his teacher, and it clearly unsettles him. He attempts to quit the competition, but Mr. AH makes it clear that this would be impossible. In a fury, Marco storms into the ballroom, twirls Celia around and kisses her hard on the mouth. The world swirls around them and everyone stops to stare, gasping. A moment later, none of them remember what they have seen, as Marco storms out of the party, erasing their memories on the way. Mr. AH follows after Marco, and as he leaves, Widget gasps: the man in grey has no shadow.

The next time Bailey visits the circus, he and Poppet return to the cloud maze, telling each other stories. They have been to the maze before and never had trouble maneuvering the room, but this time they find themselves trapped. Poppet is visibly upset when she cannot find her way out of the tiny cage they've wandered into, and begins to panic. After a considerable amount of time, Bailey discovers a key that opens the caged room. Poppet races out of the maze and away from Bailey to prepare for her show. Bailey spends the rest of the evening wandering through the many tents he has still never visited. One room is full of small bottles that release a variety of scents when opened. These scents transport Bailey into the memories of different stories. One particular scent terrifies him: the scent of bonfire mixed with caramel. The scene is hazy and confusing, but suddenly, Bailey sees a swatch of grey and feels a sharp pain in his chest mixed with the sound of a girl screaming.

In 1900, Chandresh spends most of his time in his offices pouring over blueprints. Something about the circus has been unsettling him for sometime, yet he doesn't understand what. He has turned to the brandy bottle as a way of assuaging his concerns, but nothing seems to make sense to him any more. Others have taken over the circus and he no longer feels a sense of creative control. He had hoped to move on



to another project, but he feels addled, as if he cannot concentrate on anything for longer than a few moments. He is curious of what Marco has been keeping notes on, so he breaks into his assistant's office. In a frenzy, he pulls paperwork out of folders, upends the furniture, ransacks the drawers, in search of something he cannot name. Finally, he discovers a heavy, leather bound book. Quickly flipping through its pages, Chandresh finds an elaborate drawing of a tree, with small clippings of paper that bear the signatures of every person involved in the circus glued to it. All around the names are a winding hieroglyph, very similar to the contortionist's tattoo. Suddenly, Marco is in the doorway demanding to know what Chandresh is doing. Chandresh attempts to confront Marco about the paperwork, but when he turns around, all the papers are neatly filed in their folders, the furniture and drawers neatly returned to their place. Midway through his sentence, Chandresh forgets what he was going to say, and wonders aloud what he is doing in Marco's office. Smoothly, Marco tells him that they had been discussing the circus and that he was just leaving to fetch Chandresh another bottle of brandy.

After Tara's death, Lainie Burgess begins asking questions. First, she visits with Madam Padva who sends her to see Mr. Barris. Mr. Barris admits that he had spoken to Tara about the circus' strange effects, and that he had sent her to visit with Mr. AH. Finally, Tara meets with Celia, and having tried to piece together the true nature of the circus through her various conversations, asks Celia for the truth. Celia and Lainie have been friends for ten years, so Celia has no desire to lie to her. She tells her everything, as best she can, about the dual and how the circus functions as a venue. Staring Celia directly in the eye, Lainie drops her teacup, letting it shatter on the table. Without hesitation, Celia puts the teacup back together so effectively, not a drop of tea stains the tablecloth. In response, Lainie looks at Celia with tired eyes and says, "I am tired of everyone keeping their secrets so well that they get other people killed. We are all involved in your game, and it seems we are not as easily repaired as teacups" (p. 334).

Analysis

At the circus anniversary party, Marco's character begins to come into clearer view. He announces to his teacher, Mr. AH, that he is in love with Celia and would like to back out of the competition. Mr. AH's response, although as ambiguous as ever, hints not only that it would be impossible for Marco to leave the competition but also that the competition has devastatingly high risks. His comment that loving Celia will make things difficult is the first clue that the competition loser will die. Also in this section, Marco showcases his ability to manipulate people's memories. First, Marco kisses Celia in front of the entire room of party guests at the anniversary dinner. This is a shocking act of affection that would be considered scandalous in the circus, even for those unaware of the competition. Marco risks a lot by kissing Celia, and before he storms out of the room, he erases everyone's memory of the kiss. A year later, Marco erases Chandresh's memory of their conversation in the office. This facet of Marco's character has divided critics as many argue that Marco is an unlikable character due to the way he manipulates others for his personal gain. Marco's treatment of Chandresh is particularly disturbing. Chandresh is Marco's boss, yet Marco repeatedly fuels Chandresh's



alcoholism and encourages him to shirk circus responsibilities even though he is the circus proprietor. Although ambiguous, it is clear that Marco has been manipulating Chandresh for some time. It's unclear exactly why Marco needs to manipulate his boss, but for some reason (that unfortunately is never fully explained), Marco doesn't feel safe opening up to him, so he lashes out when Chandresh threatens to unveil his secret. Through his investigation, however, the reader learns that it is Marco's spell keeping everyone in the circus safe. He has collected each circus member's signature and somehow protected them from illness, danger, and age. In this way, Celia and Marco's roles become clear. Celia is the protector of the circus while Marco is the protector of the performers.

Although they have unintentionally embroiled innocent bystanders into their battle, both illusionists are doing what they can to protect them. This sentiment is repeated during Celia's tea with Lainie. Unlike Marco, Celia is less reticent to confide her secrets with those she can trust. Lainie, like Tara before her, questions her safety within the circus yet she remains loyal to Celia and vows to help her anyway she can.

Finally, it's important to note that all the scenes between Bailey and Poppet (with the exception of his first visit to the circus) take place over the same weekend in 1902 in the same month before the novel's turning point, which takes place on Halloween, 1902. Because these scenes are spread out throughout the novel, it's easy to lose track of their close timeline. In total, Bailey spends only two weekends with the circus - the first weekend (when he was twelve years old) and this second weekend when he is seventeen or eighteen years old. What's interesting about this second weekend is the clear bond Poppet feels with him. She shares her deepest thoughts, fears, and visions with him, trusting him implicitly even though they've spent only a few days together. Like the reader, Bailey himself is confused by this trust, although he welcomes it with an open heart. Bailey doesn't understand why Poppet is drawn to him, or why he's special, because he doesn't have any magical powers. While they are in the cloud maze, however, it is Bailey who finds the key to unlock the cage. It's interesting to note that Poppet was terrified in the cloud maze, which would be the equivalent of Bailey getting lost on his family farm. It simply doesn't make sense, so Poppet knows that something is wrong. She's never been unable to navigate the maze, so she is keenly aware that something is off kilter, and this imbalance is somehow related to both her vision and Tsukiko's earlier assertion that the protective veneer around the performers is beginning to crack.

Vocabulary

Sordid, Bemuse, Festoon, Sarcophagus, Ingenuity, Bevy, Flamboyant, Tempest, Grommet, Topiary, Gild, Curios, Conspicuous, Inception, Sabotage, Brandish, Diaphanous, Panoramic, Dour, Mausoleum, Coiffed



Part Three: Intersections: Stormy Seas - Beautiful Pain

Summary

In 1901, two years after the kiss at Chandresh's party, Marco watches Celia's show. In exchange, he says that he has prepared a special new tent for her, which he transports her to using his mind control and manipulation. Suddenly, Celia is in the middle of a forest, where all the trees are made of Shakespearean poetry. He admits that his past few creations have all been to please Celia, his way of communicating with her when they are separated by distance. They talk more of their competition, the rules, and their teachers. Finally, Celia tries to explain what has happened to her father. In his effort to be in many places at once, he learned how to separate himself into atoms: if a glass of red wine were poured into a basin of water, the wine would still be there, only diluted. Prospero's trick was meant to work the same way - he would dilute himself in the world, allowing him to be many places at once, yet still able to pull all his atoms back together when he needed to be whole again. He was too ambitious, and was never able to fully pull himself back together. Now, he wanders the earth somewhere between reality and dream. Had he chosen simply one place to haunt, one place to materialize, his trick would have worked, but he got greedy and parts of himself have now drifted away. Now he has gained his immortality, but he isn't whole. Celia admits that she could probably master the same trick herself, but she is too fond of the physical world to leave it.

Marco and Celia enjoy their time together so much that Marco suggests they run away together. Celia smiles sadly, but knows it wouldn't ever be possible. She has tried before - after Marco kissed her at the party, she actually went home, packed her bags, and tried to leave. The searing pain that coursed through her finger when she was fitted with the silver ring at age six, rippled through her whole body and she passed out with pain. She asks Marco to do the same today, and he too, experiences a pain that takes him out at the knees. Gasping for breath and crying out in pain, Marco realizes that they are inextricably bound to the circus. They will never be able to escape. They must continue living in competition until one of them is declared the winner. Before they part ways, Marco gives Celia a card with his new address in London and tells her to visit him anytime.

In 1902, Bailey is on his farm, struggling to usher the sheep from one field to the other. Suddenly, Poppet appears in the pasture and asks for a word with him. The circus has been in town for a few days now, and Bailey can't imagine anything pressing enough that couldn't wait until the evening to discuss. Without going into much detail, Poppet simply asks Bailey to come with them when the circus leaves that night. She says she doesn't know why, but she has seen in her visions that Bailey must be with them. He has an important role to play in the circus. Bailey is dumbfounded, but Poppet is persistent. She is overwhelmed with emotion as she tries to explain what she's been feeling: something terrible is happening with the circus, and she fears that if Bailey



doesn't come with them, it will all fall apart. He will never see her, or anyone in the circus, ever again. Bailey doesn't understand what he can do to help - he doesn't have any special powers - and Poppet reminds him of the day they got lost in cloud maze. She had been seeing visions of Bailey for some time, but when he found the key, she knew he was the answer. She gives him a small bottle from Widget that contains the scent of his oak tree, so he will always carry home with him. Before she leaves, she kisses Bailey on the mouth and in that moment, he knows he will follow her anywhere.

On Halloween, 1901, Marco walks into Isobel's tarot card room to tell her that he never loved her. She had known this for quite some time, and seen it in her cards, but still refused to believe it until she heard the words from his own lips. When Marco leaves, Isobel is so heartbroken, so angry, that she pulls a dusty hatbox from under her table. Inside is a single tarot card, Celia's handkerchief, and Marco's black bowler hat. In a rage, she tears the ribbons that bind the three objects together. She never believed that her simple spell of temperance would have any control over the balance of the circus, so it is out of spite and frustration for her own stupidity that she tears open the spell. When her emotion settles, the candles flicker, and in the distance, she can hear Poppet screaming.

On Halloween 1902, Poppet and Widget wait by the circus gates hoping to see Bailey approaching. Poppet says that she knows the end is coming near. Widget suggests kidnapping Bailey if he's as important as Poppet suggests, but she won't hear of it.

Back in time on Halloween 1901, Herr Thiessen excitedly joins the circus for their annual masquerade night. He wanders through the circus like a man in a dream. Even the man in grey, who has never been to the circus, comes out for the evening. Stalking behind him, Chandresh marks the man in grey's every move. In a strange moment, everything in the circus seems to shift: an acrobat nearly falls to her death, the bonfire sputters, a kitten in Poppet's show twists grotesquely in the air and lands on its back, Marco crumples to the ground as if he's been punched in the stomach. And Chandresh hurls a knife at the back of the man in grey who steps deftly aside, and the knife plunges into the heart of Herr Thiessen. Poppet sees the blood pooling like paint on the ground, and breaks into blood curdling screams. As the man in grey strides from the chaos, he pulls the bloody knife from Herr Thiessen's chest and thrusts it into Marco's hands without saying a word.

On Halloween 1902, Bailey paces his house, desperately trying to decide what to do. Finally, he packs up his things, leaves his parents a note, and sets out into the night. As he crosses over the pasture, however, he is horrified to see that the circus is already gone.

After leaving the scene of Herr Thiessen's death, the man in grey confronts Prospero outside the circus. Celia had invited Mr. AH here personally tonight, in the hopes of hearing a final decision. Now, she is heartbroken, wailing over the Herr Thiessen's death. Mr. AH tells Prospero that Celia is weakening, and that no matter who wins, she will hate him forever. Meanwhile, Celia has left the circus and rushed to Marco's London apartment. She tells him of the spell Isobel had held over the circus and that it is finally



broken. Marco regrets that he never put Herr Thiessen's name in the leather bound book that would have protected him, as it protected all the other circus performers, and now it is too late. Celia had tried to repair his injuries as she had repaired her sliced fingers and broken bones in the past, but to no avail. "I am tired of trying to hold things together that cannot be held," she says. "Trying to control what cannot be controlled. I am tired of denying myself what I want for fear of breaking things I cannot fix. They will break no matter what we do" (p. 385). She throws herself into Marco's arms and for the first time ever, they make love. After, Marco does not remember falling asleep, but when he wakes, Celia is gone and she has taken his leather bound book with her.

Analysis

Marco and Celia's relationship reaches new heights in this section as the couple makes love for the first time. Before that, however, they declare their love for each other during one of Marco's illusions. He has been creating beautiful dream worlds to inhabit with Celia; the only shame is that they must meet there in secret, never sharing their experiences or their growing love for each other with friends or family. Because of his ability to haunt multiple places, Prospero has been able to keep tabs on her daughter's whereabouts (and he's always irate to discover Celia spending time with Marco), but Celia has learned to block her father's interference in her life. She's created an invisible shield of sorts that prevents her father from "feeling" where she is. It is likely this same type of spell that allows her to sneak out of Marco's apartment unnoticed. During their hopeful conversation about running away together, which they realize would be impossible due to the binding spell, Celia openly talks about her father and his strange physical condition. During the conversation, Celia mentions that, like her father, she could likely master the skill but she loves the physical world too much to leave it. She also mentions that her father likely would have been 100% successful if he had chosen just one or two places to haunt rather than dispersing his atoms all across the world. There is very clear foreshadowing happening in this scene as the stage is set for Celia to make her last, and greatest, move in the competition. Readers should be encouraged to remember Poppet and Widget's conversation on page 226 about whether it would be terrible to be trapped in one place forever. However, when Celia leaves Marco without a goodbye (and after stealing his briefcase), readers will question her motivations. Has she manipulated Marco's love for her gain in the competition?

Herr Thiessen's murder is unexpected and shocking, for the reader and for the characters. Herr Thiessen appears to be an innocent bystander, simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. The events leading up to the murder, however, are quite interesting. Celia visits Mr. AH and requests that he visit the circus, clearly in the hopes that he will judge the competition, ending it once and for all. What's unclear is Prospero's motivation in convincing Chandresh to come to the circus with a knife. Perhaps Prospero feared that Mr. AH would declare Marco the winner, putting Celia's life in danger, or perhaps he wanted to protect his own interests by erasing Mr. AH from the competition. Either way, there's no doubt that Prospero affected Chandresh's mind that night. After Herr Thiessen is stabbed, Mr. AH pulls the bloody knife from Herr Thiessen's chest and nonchalantly hands it to Marco as he exits the circus. This action



makes it clear that Mr. AH blames Marco for the accident, although again, it's not clear why. Perhaps Mr. AH is chiding Marcus for failing to protect Mr. AH in the leather bound notebook, or perhaps he's suggesting that Marco didn't do a good enough job of brainwashing Chandresh.

It's also possible that Mr. AH blames Marco's dangerous love life (which he warned Marco against): Celia is in charge of holding the circus together, and her relationship with Marco may have distracted her from her duties making it possible for a murder to happen on circus grounds. Isobel, on the other hand, destroyed the tempering spell that maintained balance within the circus. When she destroys the spell, everything in the circus shifts momentarily, making it clear to the all the performers that a dark force has cracked the protective veneer that surrounded the circus for so long. There's no doubt that when Poppet saw her kitten contort and crash during the show that night, she knew something was wrong. It's also clear that Herr Thiessen's murder fulfills the vision Poppet has been having for many years. During her conversation with Marco on the night that they make love, Celia suggests that without her powers to hold the circus together everything will crumble and the circus, including its performers, will cease to exist. Celia is exhausted and unsure how much longer she can keep everything unified. If this is valid, Poppet's sense of foreboding about the safety at the circus will come true.

It is still unclear why Poppet longs for Bailey to join the circus, except that her visions have shown her that Bailey is important to the circus' success, and given the previous conversations, it's likely that Poppet believes Bailey will be the one to restore circus unity and safety. It's interesting to note that when Poppet visits him on his farm, she brings the bottled scent of the oak tree with her. This harkens back to the story of the wizard in the tree, suggesting to the reader that Bailey may become trapped in some way. Hopefully, his entrapment will expand the betterment of the circus and save Poppet and her friends from the dark forces she fears are encroaching on her happiness. After the murder on Halloween night (which happens one year before Bailey and Poppet are reintroduced), it becomes alarmingly clear that whatever force is protecting the circus performers is beginning to crumble, yet its unclear how Bailey affects that spell and could return order and safety to the circus.

Vocabulary

Semblance, Conduit, Archaic, Incurable, Cerebral, Myriad, Boisterous, Thwart, Figment, Mirage, Unimpeded, Besotted, Purgatory, Volition, Litany, Cauldron



Part Four: Incendiary: Technicalities - Pursuit

Summary

In an effort to understand Marco's magic in the competition, Celia decides to steal his leather bound books so she can study his innermost thoughts and secrets. Perhaps if she can, she can figure out a way that they can be together for longer than a few stolen hours without compromising the competition. As she sneaks out of Marco's apartment, her father's ghost confronts her in the hallway: "You deceitful little slut" (Page 390). When she demands to know more about the competitions so that she can end it, he tells her that the competition is a test of strength, and that clearly she is weaker than he thought. Celia is horrified when he tells her that a winner will never be declared: they simply must play on until one of the opponents dies. Only then will the competition be over, and when it is, the circus, along with all its performers, will cease to exist. During their heated competition, Prospero also reveals that Tsukiko was Mr. AH's last student.

As the circus train travels from London to Munich, Celia confronts Tsukiko about her real position in the circus. She demands to know what the contortionist is really doing here, why she has meddled herself in another competition. Tsukiko is ambiguous, but admits that she was curious and has been watching the two illusionists, and she warns Celia that Marco is a master manipulator. Everything they do is a "move" in the competition, and she shouldn't grow complacent now that Marco claims to love her. Tsukiko also understands that Celia is vital to the circus remaining functional, and that if Celia cannot find a way to manage to responsibilities of the circus on her own, only then will she step in. When the circus stops in Montreal, Marco visits Celia's tent and confronts her about stealing his book. Celia admits that she is trying to find a way of making the circus independent of her powers - so that it can survive if separated from her. After her conversation with Tsukiko, Celia is hesitant to trust Marco, and doesn't want to reveal her full plan in case he will use the information against her. When Marco presses her, she admits to knowing the true nature of their competition: it will not be over until one of them is dead. If she can figure out a way to separate herself from the circus, she will kill herself so that the entire charade can be over with. Marco declares his undying love for her, but Celia with tear-stained eyes, Celia asks him to leave and never come back.

A year later, in 1902, Bailey remembers that Poppet mentioned that a train transported the circus from city to city. Hoping to catch up with her, he sprints to the nearest train station in Boston. He searches frantically, but does not see a train large enough to transport an entire circus. He does, however, notice a smattering of people wearing black outfits and red scarves. He recognizes them as fans of the circus and asks if they have any news about the circus' whereabouts. The revelers say that they will receive word within a day or two where the circus is going, so Bailey should make himself comfortable with them while they wait. As they wait, the revelers (circus fans) tell Bailey what they know of circus history, and when night falls, they invite him to stay in their



fancy hotel for the evening. The next morning, the reveurs take Bailey out for breakfast and then shopping, where they buy him a new, grey suit. As they discuss Herr Thiessen's untimely death - which was exactly one year ago today - word arrives that the circus will next stop in New York.

On the train, en route from Montreal to New York, Poppet tells Celia that she is worried about the circus. She admits her visions about Bailey taking over, but fears that everything is doomed since he failed to show up. She worries that her visions are faulty, and that the circus is headed for destruction. Celia asks Poppet to focus on her visions now, no matter how terribly they hurt her head, and to tell Celia everything she sees: Poppet sees a bonfire and a man in a bowler hat. She also sees Bailey, which is very confusing to her, because she feels certain that the vision is about something in the very near future. Meanwhile, Bailey also takes a train to New York. On the way, his fellow reveurs give him a book of Herr Thiessen's writings to occupy him during the long journey. When they arrive, they learn that bad weather has closed the circus for the night. A messenger reveals that the night before, when the circus arrived, there was a loud crash and a great deal of smoke around the tents. Without waiting for another word, Bailey desperately sprints toward the circus in search of Poppet.

Analysis

In this section, the true nature of the competition is revealed. It is a battle to the death, a dual to see which competitor, which school of magic, is more powerful, and that power is determined through stamina. This realization is particularly harrowing for Celia because she realizes how her father has treated her life with blatant disregard: he has put his pride and vanity above the value of her life, and for this reason, she will never forgive him. Celia also realizes that there is no hope for her and Marco to be together outside of the competition, and this realization is more than she can bear. Immediately, she begins to think that perhaps it would be for the best if she were to sacrifice her life for the competition. In this way, Celia and Marco's story begins to parallel Shakespeare's story of Romeo and Juliet: if the two young lovers cannot be together, death would be a welcomed relief from their suffering. The only problem is that Celia knows her powers are what hold the circus together; if she kills herself, she will be killing all the circus performers along with her. During their conversation, Tsukiko senses that Celia is perilously close to sacrificing herself in the competition, and if she does that, Tsukiko will step in to stop her: Celia is simply too valuable to the circus, and Tsukiko will not allow her to die.

Also in this section, Bailey continues his search to reunited with Poppet after accidentally missing the train on its way out of Concord. Before the circus left, Poppet asked Bailey to come with them, although she didn't explain why, only that she feels his presence is needed to preserve the circus and potentially her life. Keen readers may piece together that Poppet's fears and visions align with the fear that if Celia abandons the circus and kills herself, the circus along with all its performers, will vanish. When Bailey finally arrives in New York a few days later, he learns that there was a loud explosion at the circus site the night before, and that the circus failed to open tonight.



He knows that something is terribly wrong, so he sprints toward Poppet hoping he can help. There is a scary similarity between the sound of the explosion the night before and the "boom" that shook circus safety on the night of Herr Thiessen's murder one year ago. As the novel reaches its conclusion, it becomes clear that the explosion happened with the bonfire, the central energy source for the circus, went out.

As a side note, it's interesting to note that during the time Bailey fought to be reunited with the circus, he is taken under the wing of the Reveurs. They gift him with a new black suit (suitable for a circus ringmaster), and scrapbooks of the circus' history. As a result, Bailey is given a plethora of information that would make him an ideal circus proprietor, and in a way, being separated from the circus when it left Concord was a blessing in disguise.

Vocabulary

Derisive, Conspiratorial, Endeavor, Interim, Oscillate, Procure, Caw, Discombobulate



Part Four: Incendiary: Old Ghosts - The Second Lighting of the Bonfire

Summary

On October 31, 1902, exactly one year after Herr Thiessen's death, Isobel visits Marco's apartment in London. He doesn't want to let her upstairs, so she says what she has come to say on the street: she is sorry for not telling Marco that she was tempering the circus, and that she is partly responsible for the destruction that occurred one year ago today. She also says that she does not hate Celia for stealing him away from her, even though she's tried to hate her. Before she leaves, Isobel blows hot ash in Marco's face, temporarily blinding him, and steals his briefcase. The next evening, when Bailey arrives in New York, he frantically searches the circus grounds for Poppet. He is shocked to see that the bonfire has gone out. He expects to see Poppet waiting for him by the cauldron, but instead it's Tsukiko. She says, "I doubt she will be able to hold on much longer," but refuses to tell him more, no matter how many questions he asks (p. 445).

When Marco wakes after Isobel's attack, he is surprised to find himself at the circus in New York when he had been at his London apartment only moments before. Tsukiko stands waiting, as if she had been expecting him. Tsukiko reveals herself as Mr. AH's last student, and says that she is there to give guidance to Marco in these final days in the hopes of helping to save the circus: "They think it simple to pit any two people against each other. It is never simple. The other person becomes how you define your life, how you define yourself. They become as necessary as breathing" (Page 452). She hints that Celia is planning to kill herself today, but Tsukiko has another plan. To trap Marco in the circus the same way the magician in Widget's story traps himself in the tree. This way, Celia will live to control the circus, and Marco can sacrifice himself to the greater good without truly dying. Before Marco can throw himself in the fire, Celia rushes toward him and hurls both of them into the flames. The bonfire explodes, and then they are gone. Tsukiko sighs, lights a cigarette, and waits for Bailey to arrive.

When Celia wakes, she must imagine a familiar place to pull herself back together. She feels the same, yet diluted and dizzy. When she looks at her hands, they are solid, but everything else in the room is transparent. She wanders the strange, empty circus in search of Marco, until she finds him waiting for her in the Ice Garden. They rush toward each other, shouting each other's names, throwing themselves into a much-anticipated embrace. They hug and kiss and finally say, "I love you" (Page 463). Despite their happiness and finally being together, Celia begins to shake with the strain of holding the circus together. It is much more difficult than she expected without the power of the bonfire, and she doesn't know how much longer she can hold on. Marco urges her to let it go, but Celia doesn't know what will happen to them if she does. If the circus combusts, taking them with it, their sacrifice will have been for nothing: "It can't be self-sufficient without us," Celia says. "It needs a caretaker" (p. 464).



In the next scene, Bailey meets with the newly transparent Marco. Marco shows him around the circus - when the bonfire went out, everything stopped, frozen in time. He explains that they need Bailey to take over the circus, to work as its caregiver to ensure it stays alive. It will be an overwhelming commitment, one he can never walk away from, so Marco needs to know that he is up for the challenge. If Bailey accepts the responsibility, he must relight the bonfire, which will essentially resuscitate the heart of the circus. Bailey agrees, and Marco binds him to the circus the same way that he had once been bound to Celia - through the burning of a small silver ring. Bailey gathers together items for the new tempering: his watch and scarf, signatures from Marco's leather bound book, and a card from the tarot deck. He throws in the white glove Poppet had given him so many years ago and the bottle with the scent of his oak tree. He wishes for the bonfire to light harder than he's ever wished for anything, and joy fills his heart when he sees the first spark. The circus has been saved.

Analysis

Tsukiko's presence at the bonfire when Bailey arrives at the circus should signal to readers that she has finally stepped in to affect the competition, meaning that Celia has failed to protect the circus on her own. The timeline of these scenes is quite confusing: Tsukiko learns that Celia plans to kill herself on the one-year anniversary of Herr Thiessen's death. Tsukiko, however, feels that due to her powers to hold the circus together, Celia is too valuable to die, and if anyone should sacrifice themselves for the greater good it should be Marco. Working together with Isobel, Tsukiko organizes for Marco to be transported to the circus so she can discuss the situation with him. Like Prospero, Tsukiko has been working on a spell that would trap Marco within the circus, forever binding him to the bonfire in a dream world. Unlike Prospero, Tsukiko would ensure that Marco haunt only one location, so within his dream world, his body will feel whole and he will still be able to communicate with the outside world, albeit as a "ghost." When Celia learns of Tsukiko's plan, she knows she will never be satisfied with a love affair with a ghost, whom she will never be able to touch skin-to-skin, kiss, or make love to. Because of this, she makes a snap decision to throw herself into the bonfire along with Marco, binding both of them to the circus for all time. Although they will live as ghosts, their bodies will be solid to each other. In a way, they are inhabiting the same dream, which pulls together the theme of reality versus dreams nicely.

It's unclear exactly how Celia's altered physical state will affect her ability to hold the circus together, but it's clear that another human being, untied to the circus, will need to step in as proprietor to ensure the circus' safety and upkeep. Bailey proves to be the perfect candidate because he, like Herr Thiessen, loves the circus more than anything else in the world, and he would be willing to sacrifice his life to the circus' upkeep. In this way, his role in Poppet's visions becomes clear: she knew all along that he would be the one to keep her safe. His act of throwing the scent of the oak tree into the bonfire during its relighting recalls the story of the wizard trapped in the oak tree, and Widget's assertion that being trapped somewhere may not be terrible: "I suppose it depends on how much you like the place you're trapped in...and how much you like whoever you're stuck there with" (p. 226). The circus is saved when Bailey chooses to dedicate his life



to it, essentially trapping himself the same way Marco and Celia have. All three chose to give up the lives they love to be with the one they love.

Vocabulary

Tempering, Innumerable, Denote, Indispose, Emissary, Coherent, Bias, Vortex, Dissipate, Opaque, Tremulous, Liberate, Prone, Resplendent, Precarious, Tarnish



Part Five: Divination: Fates Foretold - Bons Reves

Summary

A few months later, Poppet visits Chandresh in his London apartment. She wanders through the deserted apartment with him before coming out with her true intention: she wants Chandresh to sign over ownership of the circus to her. Surprisingly, Chandresh agrees. He has great plans for future projects, but ever since the circus started, his brain has felt addled. Poppet smiles knowingly and gives Chandresh a gift in return for his generosity: a clear mind for the future. Although she isn't capable of giving the old man back his memories, she can ensure that his mind is focused for his future projects: "As soon as her lips touch his skin, Chandresh feels better than he has in years, as though the last of the fog has been lifted from him" (p. 492).

A year later, Widget makes a visit of his own, with Mr. AH. The two men discuss Marco and Celia's competition and its strange outcome. Mr. AH finally clarifies what the competition had been about. As the novel comes a close, Mr. AH asks Widget to tell him a story in exchange for his claim over what is left of the circus. Bailey agrees, settling comfortably back in his chair. He looks Mr. AH in the eye and begins: "The circus comes arrives without warning" (p. 502).

Analysis

In the final section of the novel, all the story's loose ends are tied up. Marco and Celia live happy lives haunting the circus together. Bailey has done a wonderful job keeping the circus afloat, and his business card (which includes an email address) suggests to readers that the circus is still on the move today. The short vignettes throughout the novel, always written in second-person narration to fully engage the reader, have also been used to suggest that the circus is still running and that if readers are very lucky, the circus might one day come their way. Now that Poppet has reached maturity, her magical skills have improved and she is able to heal the damage done to Chandresh's mind in exchange for him permanently signing the circus over to Bailey.

During Widget's visit with Mr. AH, Mr. AH finally opens up about the true meaning of the competition, explaining in full detail what had been slowly piecing together throughout the novel: the competition is a test of magical stamina: "The pitting of our students against each other began as simple tests, though over time they became more complex. They were always, at the heart, challenges of chaos and control to see which technique was strongest. It is one thing to put two competitors in a ring and wait for one to hit the ground. It is another to see how they fare when there are other factors in the ring along with them. When there are repercussions with every action taken" (p. 495). Although Mr. AH has taken great pride in his past students' success, it is clear that he is



getting old and tired. He agrees to sign over whatever claim he holds over the circus to Widget in exchange for a story. This seems to be a strange trade-off and this interaction also reveals Mr. AH's desperate desire for immortality, much like Prospero. Widget tells Mr. AH the story of how the circus came to be, which not only highlights Morgenstern's theme of cyclic time, it also provides Mr. AH with a legacy. His story, and therefore his impact on history, will live forever alongside the magical circus and the great love story that he helped create.

Vocabulary

Antechamber, Rune, Fathom, Satchel, Disarray, Inherent, Jade, Relinquish, Mar, Trepidation, Amalgamation, Indistinguishable, Sentiment, Inkling, Pique, Palpable, Bard, Stalemate, Obtrusive



Characters

Celia Bowen

Celia Bowen is the novel's main protagonist. She is a beautiful young woman, with brown curly hair and intense eyes. As an illusionist, her best skill is her ability to repair broken things - teacups, clocks, personal injuries, and eventually, her own atoms. At the tender age of five, Celia's mother commits suicide, and she is sent to live with her father, a magician billed as Prospero the Entertainer. Like her father, Celia was born with the gift of real magic, and she would spend the rest of her life passing her magic off as illusions for paying audiences. As soon as Prospero recognizes his daughter's talent, he begins obsessively training her art, challenging her to dark tasks like repairing her fingertips after he slits them open and resetting her bones after he smashes them. Throughout her training, Celia remains calm and collected, retaining all her father's information without an understanding of when she will use it, or why. A few months after moving in with her father, he cruelly engages her in a dual to the death with a yet unnamed opponent. The two magicians will exhibit their finest magic, and continue to compete until the stress of competition fells one player. Celia continues to train until she is eighteen-years-old, when she is sent to work as an illusionist at a circus. It is there that she meets her opponent, Marco Alisdair, and eventually falls in love with him. Celia does what she can to keep the circus together, cognizant of the fact that the circus, the venue for her dual with Marco, has put many people, people she has come to call her friends, in danger. When Celia realizes that she can never be with Marco in this world, she throws herself and Marco into the circus bonfire, scattering their atoms in one final act of magic. By using the fire as a touchstone, she and Marco are able to haunt the circus, caught somewhere between the physical world and dream world. Although they must stay with the circus forever, they are happy to finally be together, having broken the bonds of their childhood dual.

Marco Alisdair

Marco Alisdair is Celia Bowen's magical opponent and later, her lover. He is described as tall, dark, and dashing handsome. He wears an illusion mask over his real face, which is more handsome than his real face, which he only reveals to Celia. As a magician, Marco's greatest skill is his mind manipulation. He can control what others see, and what they remember. As a result, he can transport people into his own imagination, and if he chooses later, can erase all memory of the journey from their minds. When Marco is nine years old, he is randomly plucked from an orphanage and trained to become a great magician. Marco's teacher, the man in grey, believes that reading is the best way to intake knowledge, so he limits all human contact for most of Marco's childhood. The first person Marco meets when he is allowed to live on his own at the age of eighteen is a young woman named Isobel Martin, whom he later moves in with. When he learns that his opponent will be sent to a moving circus, he asks Isobel to join the circus and report Celia's movements back to him. He also enchants the circus



bonfire as a touchstone, so he can always be in contact with the circus even when he is separated by distance. The more time he spends with Celia over the following years, however, Marco realizes that he is in love with her and would do anything to be with her. He attempts to leave the circus and sacrifice himself in the dual, but he isn't allowed. In the end, Celia saves them both when she throws them into the fire, sending them into an eternity together haunting the physical world.

Isobel Martin

Isobel Martin is Marco's first girlfriend in London. When he learns that Celia will be working in the circus, Marco sends Isobel to work as a tarot card reader for the circus so she can report back on Celia's movements to him. For thirteen years, Celia thinks she is helping the man she loves. In her tarot cards, however, she sees that Marco is not in love with her, that he is love with someone else, yet she refuses to believe it. In addition to her work as a tarot card reader, Isobel has performed a simple tempering spell that lends balance to the circus, which she doesn't believe has any real power over circus dynamic. When Marco finally tells Isobel the truth, that he is in love with Celia, Isobel destroys the temperance spell and the circus begins to implode. Moments after the spell is broken, Chandresh stabs and kills Herr Thiessen, and the magic that had been holding everyone together begins to unravel.

Prospero the Entertainer / Hector Bowen

Prospero the Entertainer / Hector Bowen is Celia's father. Prospero lives as a ghost in the physical world after an experiment with invincibility went wrong and scattered his atoms around the world. Now, he is forced to haunt his old hangouts, using various objects as touchstones. Once, Prospero had been a world renown magician passing off real magic as illusion for his paying guests. He had once studied under Mr. AH, the man in grey, and conflicted with him over which school of magic was better - the old or the new. As a result, the two magicians began teaching independently, pitting their students against each other in simple duals. Over time, these duals to decide which methodology was superior became more complex, culminating in the dual between Marco and Celia.

The Man in Grey / Mr. AH / Alexander

The Man in Grey or Mr. AH or Alexander is Marco's magic instructor. The most mysterious of all the novel's characters, little is known about the man in grey other than the fact that he is a very old magician who once taught Prospero the Entertainer, before their methodologies conflicted. He is a cold, calculating man who seems to have no emotion toward Marco, even though he plucked him from an orphanage and raised him to be a great magician. As an old-school magician, he feared that the circus would be too exposed as a venue for the dual, but ultimately gives in to Prospero's demands. He is characterized by the grey suit he always wears, and the fact that he has no shadow.



Chandresh Christophe Lefevre

Chandresh Christophe Lefevre is the original owner and designer of the circus. He is an eccentric perfectionist known to throw lavish parties and midnight dinners. As time passes, however, Chandresh's mind begins to slip and he finds that something unsettles him about the circus. He has become an alcoholic, drinking bottle after bottle of brandy, and lives under the control of Marco's mind manipulations. In an alcohol-fuelled frenzy, Chandresh bursts into the circus on the evening that Isobel's tempering spell is broken, and accidentally kills Herr Thiessen. At the end of the novel, Isobel removes the memory of the murder from his mind, and clears that haze that he been caused by so many years of alcohol abuse and manipulation.

Bailey

Bailey is a young boy from Concord, Massachusetts who inadvertently falls in love with the circus. In 1897, when he is twelve years old, his sister dares him to break into the circus during daytime and bring back evidence of his entrance. During his dare, Bailey meets Poppet and begins a lifelong fascination with her. Five years later, the circus returns to Concord and Bailey seeks Poppet out. After Poppet convinces him that he is somehow related to the circus, that the circus needs him to survive, Bailey agrees to leave home and become the proprietor of Le Cirque de Reves.

Penelope Aislin Murray / Poppet

Penelope Aislin Murray / Poppet is one of the redheaded twins born on the night of the circus' opening, October 13-14, 1886. Penelope (Poppet) is born seven minutes after midnight, and as a result, is gifted with the ability to see into the future while her twin brother, born six minutes before midnight, is able to see into the past. Poppet is the first to meet Bailey and to recognize that he should be the new proprietor of the circus. She also foresees the horrific event in which Chandresh stabs and kills Herr Thiessen, although she doesn't understand it.

Winston Aidan Murray / Widget

Winston Aidan Murray / Widget is one of the redheaded twins born on the night of the circus' opening, October 13-14, 1886. Winston (Widget) is born six minutes before midnight, and as a result, is gifted with the ability to see into the past while his sister, born seven minutes after midnight, is able to see into the future.



Madame Ana Padva / Tante Padva

Madame Ana Padva / Tante Padva is one of the founding members of Le Cirque de Reves. As a retired prima ballerina, Madame Padva, known affectionately among the circus workers as "Tante Padva" is responsible for costumes and choreography.

Mr. Ethan W. Barris

Mr. Ethan W. Barris is one of the founding members of Le Cirque de Reves. He works as the main engineer of the circus, and even becomes involved in the battle between Marco and Celia when he agrees to help them construct the ice garden, where both magicians build on each other's previous illusions.

Tara Burgess

Tara Burgess is twins with Lainie Burgess, and along with her sister, is one of the founding members of Le Cirque de Reves. Tara and her sister are mostly in charge of the circus' ambiance, and do what they can to deliver full sensory experiences for the guests. When Tara begins to question the way time has affected the circus, she confronts the wrong people asking the wrong questions. When she is killed by an oncoming train, it's unclear to the reader whether she chose to step onto the tracks or if she was under the spell of Mr. AH, the man in grey.

Lainie Burgess

Lainie Burgess is twins with Tara Burgess, and along with her sister, is one of the founding members of Le Cirque de Reves. Lainie and her sister are mostly in charge of the circus' ambiance, and do what they can do deliver full sensory experiences for the guests. After Tara's death, Lainie also seeks to discover the truth of the circus, and ends up being more successful because she confronts Celia directly about the circus' strange nature.

Tsukiko

Tsukiko is the contortionist at the circus. She impresses Chandresh when she unexpectedly arrives at a midnight dinner party and performs without being invited. As the circus progresses around the world, Tsukiko takes many of the performers under her wing and nurtures them in the strange environment. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that, like Marco, Tsukiko trained under Mr. AH and battled with her opponent until her opponent's death.



Herr Friedrich Thiessen

Herr Friedrich Thiessen is the German clockmaker who makes the Wunschtraum clock that hangs in the center of Le Cirque de Reves. He exchanges many letters with Celia Bowen, leading the reader to believe that they are falling in love. After Celia begins her romantic relationship with Marco, Herr Thiessen is accidentally killed on Halloween Eve, 1902, breaking Celia's heart.



Objects/Places

Le Cirque de Reves

Le Cirque de Reves is a mysterious circus that only opens at night. It is completely monochromatic in design, featuring only black, white and greys in its color scheme, with towering tents of varying shapes and sizes, an elaborate wrought-iron fence, and a black sign painted in white letters that reads "Opens at Nightfall, Closes at Dawn" (p. 4).

The Wunschtraum Clock

The Wunschtraum Clock, which was built by Herr Friedrich Thiessen, is one of the main focal points of the circus. The handcrafted clock is profoundly dreamlike. At first glance, it just looks like a beautiful black clock with a white face and silver pendulum, but when it is wound, it takes on a life of its own. Slowly, its face falls away like puzzle pieces, and morphs from white to grey to black. Every hour, the juggling "cuckoo" adds another ball to his act. It is Herr Thiessen's crowning jewel and one of the highlights of the entire circus.

The Bonfire

The Bonfire is the central energy source for Le Cirque de Reves. It was lit on the opening night of the circus, and although the twelve archers who lit the fire each contributed a different color flame, the bonfire burns solid white, keeping with the circus' color scheme. The bonfire holds particular significance for Marco, who uses it as a connection to Celia when he is separated from the circus, but it also becomes a touchstone for their relationship when Celia throws them into the fire, allowing them to haunt the circus forever at the end of the novel.

The Oak Tree

The Oak Tree is Bailey's strongest connection to home, and one of the main reasons why he initially balks at the idea of joining the circus: he doesn't want to leave his beloved tree. To persuade him to join the circus, Widget bottles the scent of the tree for Bailey to carry with him, although Bailey throws the bottle into the bonfire when he chooses to join up with the circus at the end of the novel.

The Ice Garden

The Ice Garden initially begins as an elaborate gift from Marco to Celia. With the help of Mr. Barris, Marco constructs a gorgeous garden in which every flower is made of ice. Celia is so enamored with the room that she asks if she can expand on it. When Marco



agrees, the ice garden becomes their first collaboration, although neither of their teachers approve of the partnership.

The Cloud Maze

The Cloud Maze is one of the most complex tents in the circus. Comprised of many layers of clouds, guests make their way through an elaborate labyrinth of nature's variety. While in the cloud maze with Bailey, Poppet gets stuck for the first time and panics. When Bailey finds the key that unlocks a particular room, Poppet feels sure that he should be the one to take over the circus.

The Stargazer

The Stargazer is a ride at the circus that lays guests on their backs so they have a perfect view of the night's skies. While riding on the stargazer with Bailey one evening, Poppet has a strong vision of the night when Chandresh will accidentally kill Herr Thiessen. The vision comes to her in a flash and gives her a blinding headache, which terrifies her.

The Tempering Spell

The Tempering Spell is a small spell Isobel performed when the circus first opened as a way of balancing the scales between Marco and Celia. When she finds out that Marco is in love with Celia, Isobel destroys the tempering spell - which had been held together with a tarot card, Marco's bowler hat, and Celia's handkerchief - destroying the circus' delicate balance. After Isobel destroys the spell, a crack in the circus forms, allowing for Chandresh to accidentally kill Herr Thiessen.

The Leather Bound Notebook

The Leather Bound Notebook is one of the many ways Marco keeps in contact with the circus while separated by distance. The notebook contains hand signatures of each of the circus performers, which, through a strange spell, protects them from harm while they work for the circus and also seems to stop their ageing. After sleeping with Marco for the first time, Celia steals the leather bound notebook with the hopes of discovering the secret to Marco's magic.

Halloween

Halloween is the holiday on which Herr Thiessen dies. The circus always celebrates All Saint's Eve, when the living and the dead socialize for the evening, with an extravagant party. In 1902, at this party, Isobel breaks the tempering spell and soon after, Herr Thiessen is killed.

Reveurs

Reveurs are traveling fans of the circus. The movement began after Herr Thiessen began writing about the circus in detail, and a fan base for his writing formed. As he traveled from city to city following the circus, he spent his days in pubs with other circus fans discussing their favorite tents and performers, and communicating with each other when they heard where the circus was heading next. Over time, the group began wearing a uniform of all black, accented with a red accessory so they could recognize each other in crowds.



Themes

Free Will

When Marco and Celia are children, they become embroiled in a magical competition forcing them to fight until the death. The children have no choice but to join the competition at their teacher's urgings. Once they are scarred with the ring of commitment, there is no backing out of the deal. Every move that Marco and Celia make, from the moment they wake up until the moment they fall asleep, is considered a "move" in the never-ending chess game that pits illusionist against illusionist. For all of the lives, Celia and Marco believe they have no freewill. They cannot travel, study, explore, or communicate with anyone without their teacher's explicit permission. Marco's upbringing is even stricter than Celia's in that his interactions with the outside world are completely restricted: he lives his entire childhood in isolation so the modern world cannot influence him. After Celia and Marco fall in love, they find that they are unable to leave the circus, and therefore unable to be together. The mere thought of running away unleashes an unbearable, searing pain pulsating through their bodies. Along with all the circus performers, they have been bound to the circus through a series of spells that makes it impossible to leave until the battle is complete. If anyone even dares to ask questions, they put themselves at risk. Lainie Burgess, for example, dared to question the circus set-up and was run over by a train, likely the handiwork of Mr. AH, Marco's teacher.

When the situation seems most dire, however, clever characters begin to discover ways of reclaiming their free will. Poppet, for example, finds a way to fight against the circus that defines her existence by encouraging Bailey to take over from the tyrannical teachers. Even Marco and Celia sacrifice themselves to the bonfire, forever tying themselves to the circus, in order to be free, or as close to free as they can manage. By damning themselves to a life away from the physical world, Marco and Celia make it impossible for the competition to continue. They will live their lives together, yet isolated from the rest of the world. To them, the sacrifice is worth the reward. Exiling themselves was their only option, and in this way, they proved that free will can never be truly taken away.

Good Versus Evil

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Marco and Celia's ongoing battle is that the reader never witnesses an actual conflict. The two illusionists are never in the same arena, for example, showcasing their magical powers for a panel of judges. Within the competition between the illusionists, there is no sense of good and evil, as one might expect from a novel about rivalry. Although Celia and Marco are meant to be enemies, they find themselves falling in love with each other. The circus itself is starkly black and white, clear-cut and defined, yet although the reader sometimes mistrusts the lover's motivations, it is impossible to root for one's success without also rooting for the other.



In this way, good and evil intermingle, confusing loyalty and morality. Addressing this issue, Tsukiko, a former competitor says of the teachers, "They think it simple to pit any two people against each other. It is never simple. The other person becomes how you define your life, how you define yourself. They become as necessary as breathing" (p. 452).

The "evil" then becomes the callousness with which the teachers regard human life: the care only about their game, not about the lives affected and ultimately, the lives lost. Readers begin to root for the young illusionists to find a way of overcoming their curse, of outwitting their teachers and finding a way to reclaim their free will. The "good" is symbolized in their young love, their willingness to sacrifice themselves so the other can be free. In the end, Marco and Celia are forced to strike a compromise: sacrificing their physical lives to live together, in peace, in the dream world. The result is as muddy and complicated as their love, no one is truly considered a winner and no one is a loser. Good has not fully overcome evil, nor the other way around. At the end of the "competition," a stalemate has been announced, leaving the reader with the message that the world is complicated and complex. There is no absolute evil nor absolute good. One must continue to fight for what they believe in everyday of their lives, until the end comes. And then, all that's left will be their stories.

Time

Time plays an interesting role in the novel, particularly in the way that it affects the circus performers. Time is most directly symbolized in the clock Herr Thiessen builds for the courtyard. At first glance, it just looks like a beautiful black clock with a white face and silver pendulum, but when it is wound, it takes on a life of its own. Slowly, its face falls away like puzzle pieces, and morphs from white to grey to black. It is described as "dreamlike," illuminating the circus' theme of creating a "dream world" where visitors walk at night. All of the circus performers seem to be magically protected from the effects of time - none of them, except for the Murray twins - have aged a day since the circus opened. The only person to truly question the nature of time within the circus is Lainie Burgess, who dies shortly after raising her questions: "I am finding it difficult to discern between sleep and awake...I do not like being left in the dark. I am not particularly fond of believing in impossible things" (p. 194).

In the end, Widget insinuates that the entire novel is an allegory to time: "Time has altered and condensed their nuances, made them more than story, greater than the sums of their parts. But that requires time. The truest tales require time and familiarity to become what they are" (p. 494). At the end of the novel, Widget begins retelling the story, starting with the first line, again hinting at the cyclic nature of time. There is no sense of time within a dream world, which is likely what Morgenstern is hinting at with the novel's jumbled and fragmented format. The novel jumps around in time, highlighting the way the past, present, and future are all intertwined.



Style

Point of View

The Night Circus is recounted from the point of view of an omniscient, third-person narrator, which means that the narrator has access to the thoughts and emotions of all the novel's characters. The narrator is all knowing and can be in many places at once. For example, on the night of the circus' opening, the narrator retells the events from multiple character's perspectives, giving the reader a well-rounded representation of circus life, and the events of important events such as the lighting of the bonfire and the accidental murder of Herr Thiessen. It is interesting to note that the narrator knows more about certain characters, such as Mr. AH, than the other characters do. The reader is privy to Mr. AH's uncertainty about the competition and his treatment of Marco, even when Marco, Mr. AH's closest ally, remains ignorant. This knowledge gives the reader a false sense of security.

At times, it seems as if the reader knows more than the characters, yet the reader often feels confused and frustrated. Morgenstern has a habit of hinting at important knowledge without fully revealing it. This leaves the reader with a feeling of mistrust for the narrator, who is omniscient yet guarded. Although the narrator knows and understands everything, the story is constructed as a puzzle, leaving readers in the dark until the very end. Some readers will appreciate the novel's complex structure and storytelling devices, while the many layers of confusion may frustrate others.

Setting

The bulk of The Night Circus is set over the course of thirty years from 1873 - 1902, although an argument can be made that the novel reaches into present day. The timing of the novel is important because the circus is set in the era before electricity, modern medicine, and the Internet, all of which would distract from the novel's "magic." The plot centers around Le Cirque de Reves, a mysterious circus that only opens at night. It is completely monochromatic in design, featuring only black, white and greys in its color scheme, with towering tents of varying shapes and sizes, an elaborate wrought-iron fence, and a black sign painted in white letters that reads "Opens at Nightfall, Closes at Dawn" (p. 4). The circus travels from city to city, seemingly on a whim, to a variety of settings, mostly throughout North America and Europe. Despite the array of settings, the circus is always described the same way, and is untouched by the outside world. Within these settings, the two cities that seem to have the most importance are New York City and London, two international, metropolitan cities. London is where the idea of the circus was conceived, and New York City is where its run as the venue for Marco and Celia's competition comes to an end. Although thirty years pass in the novel's setting, the circus is unaffected by time, so the reader may likely forget that time is passing at all. The circus becomes a living and breathing character of its own, distracting from its role as the novel's setting.



Language and Meaning

Despite the novel's seemingly adolescent premise: two young illusionists falling in love at a traveling circus, *The Night Circus* is undoubtedly an adult novel. Within the first few pages, Morgenstern ensures that she weeds out young readers with Prospero the Entertainer's first line, upon realizing that he has fathered a child: "Well, fuck" (p. 10). In this one sentence, so early in the novel, Morgenstern makes a clear statement that this magical story is not for children. For the rest of the novel, Morgenstern uses an advanced vocabulary with very little context for understanding new words without previous knowledge. Although engaging, the novel's structure - from the plot to the chapters to the sentences themselves - are winding, confusing, and take time to puzzle out.

The novel is set in the late 19th and early 20th century and the language reflects that era. Although somewhat intimidating, once the reader gets used to the style, it is not a hindrance to the comprehension of the novel. This language, in fact, adds a depth to the novel that allows the reader a glimpse into a world that is made believable through the language used the characters and narrator. Through Morgenstern's vivid descriptive style, the reader is transported - physically and emotionally - to a raucous circus, a world that wouldn't be as accessible without the rich layers of language used to create its landscape. She invokes all five senses to transport the reader, so they are left with the taste of cotton candy on their tongue and the smell of caramel apples in the air, long after the book is closed.

Structure

The Night Circus is divided into five parts. Part One, *Primordium*, focuses on the two illusionists lives before their competition begins. It establishes the characters of Marco and Celia independent from each other. This section highlights the two schools of magic that will be competing throughout the novel and depicts the conception of the circus as the venue for their dual. It ends before the circus' opening night, a new chapter in all the character's lives. Part Two, *Illumination*, describes life in the circus. It focuses primarily on Marco and Celia's battle and their struggle to understand the rules of their competition. Part Two is the longest section in the novel because it is when most of the characters, conflicts, and plot points are flushed out. At the end of this section, Marco and Celia realize that they have romantic feelings for each other, which changes everything. Part Three, *Intersections*, focuses on the growing conflict between Celia and Marco as they struggle to determine whether they can trust each other in the midst of competition. It ends when the couple makes love for the first time, a turning point in their relationship. Part Four, *Incendiary*, focuses on Marco and Celia's lives since falling in love. They fight to find a way to live independently from the circus, a way to break the spell that binds them together as competitors so they can live together as lovers. It ends when they sacrifice themselves to the dream world so that they can live together, free of competition. Part Five, *Divination*, ties the novel's loose ends together. It discusses the



legacy of the circus, and Bailey's rise to the role of proprietor in the wake of the competition's stalemate.

The novel's nonlinear and often confusing timeline has been a point of contention for many critics. Some claim that the novel is unnecessarily complicated, and that a traditional structure would have served the story just as well, if not better. Others argue that the fragmented structure is critical to Morgenstern's representation of history and time as cyclic. There is no sense of time within dreams, and therefore this must be reflected in the circus' constructed dream world. The theme must also, then, be highlighting within the novel's structure, referencing the way the past, present, and future are intertwined.



Quotes

We must put effort and energy into anything we wish to change" (p. 24).

People see what they want to see. And in most cases, what they are told to see" (p. 33).

This is all a lie ... The dead are not hovering nearby to knock politely at teacups and tabletops and whisper through billowing curtains" (p. 48).

How is anything better than anything else here? How is one tent comparable to another? How can any of this possibly be judged? (p. 149)

I cannot use anything she does for my own purposes. The sides need to remain separate. If we were playing a game of chess, I could not simply remove her pieces from the board. My only option is to retaliate with my own pieces when she moves hers" (p. 164).

The finest pleasures are always the unexpected ones" (p. 175).

I am finding it difficult to discern between sleep and awake...I do not like being left in the dark. I am not particularly fond of believing in impossible things" (p. 194).

We live in a fish bowl, dear...very carefully monitored fish. Watched from all angles. If one of us floats to the top, it was not accidental" (p. 242).

The past stays on you the way powdered sugar stays on your fingers. Some people can get rid of it, but it's still there, the events and things that pushed you to where you are now" (p. 258).

I am tired of everyone keeping their secrets so well that they get other people killed. We are all involved in your game, and it seems we are not as easily repaired as teacups" (p. 334).

Everything you do, every moment of the day and night is a move. You carry your chessboard with you, it is not contained within canvas and stripes. Though you and your opponent do not have the luxury of polite squares to stay upon" (p. 400).

They think it simple to pit any two people against each other. It is never simple. The other person becomes how you define your life, how you define yourself. They become as necessary as breathing" (p. 452).

Time has altered and condensed their nuances, made them more than story, greater than the sums of their parts. But that requires time. The truest tales require time and familiarity to become what they are" (p. 494).



Topics for Discussion

Topic for Discussion 685038

How does the novel address time? What symbolism can be found in Herr Thiessen's clock, the birth of the Murray twins, and the ageing of the circus performers? Why is the manipulation of time important to the novel's plot and themes? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Topic for Discussion 685039

Describe Chandresh's role in the circus' conception, execution, and legacy. How is Chandresh personally affected by the circus' success? Is this surprising? Why or why not? What, in your opinion, causes Chandresh's emotional unraveling? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Topic for Discussion 685040

Discuss the representation of fatherhood in the novel. How is Mr. AH a father-figure to Marco? How does his fathering technique compare or contrast to Prospero's? Based on these two father's treatment of their "children," what is the novel's overarching message about the impact parents have on their children? Does the novel present any parental figures that challenge this message? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Topic for Discussion 685041

Would you consider the circus to be a moral place? Why or why not? Why might it be important that the performers (aside from Marco and Celia) remain oblivious to the competition? What message does this send the reader about the value of life? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Topic for Discussion 685042

At the closing of the novel, the reader is left to believe that the circus is still traveling. What clues does the novel give that the circus is ongoing? How do you think the circus would fare over time? Would the circus need to evolve to suit each generation or is it distinctive enough to transcend time? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.



Topic for Discussion 685043

Discuss the novel's nonlinear timeline. What effect did the jumbled timeline have on you as a reader? What effect do you think Morgenstern was attempting to create, and how does the timeline influence the novel's themes? In the end, do you think Morgenstern's effect was successful? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Topic for Discussion 685044

What do you think happened to Marco and Celia at the end of the novel? How do you think their relationship has fared without the stress of the competition to hold them together? Do you believe Marco and Celia bound themselves to each other willingly? Was it simply another side effect of their teacher's decisions? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Topic for Discussion 685045

Why do you think Bailey was so willing to give up his life for the circus? Do you think he was a good choice as proprietor, or should another character have taken over? What did Bailey give up in his decision? What did he gain? Do you think he made the right decision? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.