

# **Something Wicked This Way Comes Study Guide**

**Something Wicked This Way Comes by Ray Bradbury**

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## Overview

When Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show comes to Green Town, the book's protagonists, thirteen-year-old boys named Jim and Will, quickly discover that there is something evil riding with the carnival. A variety of frightening and bizarre transformations occur, many of them connected with the carnival's carousel. It seems to have the power to turn adults into children and children into adults. The novel is predominantly a frightening Gothic entertainment, but, on a more serious level, Bradbury treats the theme of maturity and the various ways it can be achieved.

## About the Author

Raymond Douglas Bradbury was born on August 22, 1920, in Waukegan, Illinois, to Leonard Spaulding and Esther Moberg Bradbury. He began his writing career while still a teen-ager, publishing *Futura Fantasia*, a fan magazine. His first professional sale, the short story "Pendulum," appeared in the November 1941 edition of *Super Science Stories*.

After working as a newsboy from 1940 until 1943, Bradbury turned to a fulltime writing career. During the 1940s, his work was published in several science-fiction magazines, including *Weird Tales*.

The 1950s and early 1960s proved to be Bradbury's most productive time as a fiction writer. Published in 1950, his first short story collection, *The Martian Chronicles*, achieved enormous popularity. Several more collections followed; *The Illustrated Man*, *The Golden Apples of the Sun*, *A Medicine for Melancholy*, and *The Machineries of Joy* were among the most successful. He also published three novels—*Fahrenheit 451*, *Dandelion Wine*, and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. He served as president of the Science Fantasy Writers of America (1951-1953) and as a member of the Screen Writers Guild board of directors (1957-1961).

Since the mid-1960s, Bradbury has concentrated his literary efforts on drama and poetry. He achieved a modicum of success with several of his plays—including *The Anthem Sprinters and Other Antics* (1963), *The World of Ray Bradbury* (1964), and *Leviathan 99* (1972)—which were staged in Los Angeles or New York. His poetry has met with disdain from literary critics but sells reasonably well.



# Plot Summary

William Halloway and James Nightshade are two boys who live in the small Midwestern town of Green Town, Illinois. Born a few days apart, and just short of their fourteenth birthdays, the two boys live next door to each other and are inseparable best friends. A mysterious lightning rod salesman comes through town and strikes up a conversation with the boys, warning them that a storm is approaching. The boys learn that a carnival is coming to town called Cooger & Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show; they see ads in the stores downtown.

Charles Halloway is Will's father. He is fifty-four-years-old, and feels old and unhappy. He is the janitor in the town's public library, which is also his favorite refuge, especially late at night when no one else is there. Charles also sees the posters for the carnival and feels nostalgic for his youth.

Train whistles awaken the boys at three in the morning. It is late in the year for a carnival to be showing up (a week before Halloween), and an even stranger thing for it to show up in the middle of the night. At the library, Charles Halloway also hears the whistle and gets a strange feeling. The boys sneak out of their bedrooms and go to the carnival grounds to look at the eerie sight of the train parked there silently. The next day, they discover the Mirror Maze, from which they rescue their panicked teacher, Miss Foley. Jim is magnetically drawn to the carnival, and sneaks back that night after it is closed. Will is hurt that Jim has gone without him, and he follows Jim there.

The boys come upon a merry-go-round, but two gruff men tell them the ride is broken. The two men turn out to be the owners of the carnival, Mr. Cooger and Mr. Dark. The boys are told to go home and come back the next day, but they run off and hide and watch. They see Mr. Cooger get on the carousel as it starts turning backwards. When he gets off, he is a twelve-year-old boy. Later, the boys chase the young Mr. Cooger until he gets back on the ride and goes forward, growing older as he does. The boys inadvertently break the switchbox for the ride, so the ride keeps going around and around with Mr. Cooger on it, until he is over one-hundred-years-old when he finally gets off. Jim and Will run away.

Mr. Halloway suspects that something unusual is going on with the two boys, but Will wants him to stay out of it. An evil witch from the carnival comes towards Will's house in a hot-air balloon looking for him, but Will manages to destroy the balloon and get away. The next day Will and Jim find an unfamiliar little girl crying hysterically by the side of the road. They realize with a shock that it is their teacher, Miss Foley, after she has taken a ride on the carousel.

Will and Jim finally tell Mr. Halloway everything, and he decides to help them. While the carnival is parading through town, Mr. Halloway meets Mr. Dark, and tells him who he is and where he works. Later that night, Mr. Halloway is in the library with the two boys when Mr. Dark enters. The boys hide, but Mr. Dark finds them and crushes Mr. Halloway's hand when he tries to stop Mr. Dark. Dark takes the boys away and sends



the witch in to make Mr. Halloway's heart stop. Just as Mr. Halloway is about to go under, he opens his eyes and looks at the witch; he is struck by the absurdity of the situation he is in and the absurdity of life in general, and he begins laughing loudly in the witch's face. This scares the witch off, and saves him.

Back at the carnival, Mr. Halloway surprises Mr. Dark by coming out of the crowd and volunteering to participate in an act onstage where someone shoots a rifle at the witch, but she catches the bullet and survives. Mr. Halloway shoots the witch, but something goes wrong with the act and she dies. Will comes out of the hypnotic stupor that Mr. Dark put him in, but Jim goes and gets on the carousel and begins to ride forward. Will manages to pull Jim off, and Jim lies on the ground, apparently dead. Will begins crying, but Mr. Halloway yells at him to dance, sing, laugh, anything. Eventually, they both jump around whooping and hollering, and Jim wakes up. The carnival crashes down around them and disappears into the night.

# Prologue

## Prologue Summary

The time is October, one week before Halloween. October is compared to other months from the point of view of a young boy. For instance, September is bad because school starts, but June is the best, because summer is just beginning. Sounds, sights, and smells of previous Octobers are remembered, as well as the yearly anticipation of Halloween. During one "strange wild dark long year" Halloween comes early. The two main characters, James Nightshade and William Holloway, are introduced. Both boys are close to their fourteenth birthdays, being born one day apart.

## Prologue Analysis

In a single page, the main framework of the story is set up for the reader. It takes place in October, with two thirteen-year-old boys as the main protagonists; the point of view is that of the boys. It is clear that something life changing happens to them during this Halloween season.





# Part 1: Chapters 1, 2, and 3

## Part 1: Chapters 1, 2, and 3 Summary

A lightning rod salesman named Tom Fury enters Green Town, Illinois, on a cloudy October day. A great lightning storm is in the distance, approaching the town. Tom comes upon Jim and Will, lounging outside on the grass. They proudly tell the story of how they were born not only one day apart but also two minutes apart. Will was born one minute before midnight on October 30, while Jim came into the world a minute after midnight, on Halloween.

Looking for a sale, the salesman keeps asking the two boys if they have any money. When they answer negatively, he ends up giving them a lightning rod anyway. It is very heavy, with all kinds of exotic and strange Egyptian, Arabic, Abyssinian, and other kinds of writing and pictures on it.

The salesman asserts that the storm coming "is no ordinary storm." Will asks which house will be hit by the lightning. Fury goes up to each of the boys' houses (they live next door to each other), closes his eyes, and puts his hands on each house. He declares that Jim's house will get hit. Jim is happy to hear this, while Will feels disappointed and left out. When the salesman leaves, Jim just sits there, smiling. Will is exasperated with Jim's inactivity in the face of the coming storm, and rushes to get a ladder and put the lightning rod up on Jim's house himself.

After eating supper, the two boys make their regular weekly visit to the local library. Jim suddenly stops at the library steps, hearing something "like music" in the distance. Will doesn't hear anything. Jim shakes his head, decides it was his imagination, and they go inside. Will spies his father, who is a voracious reader, in the library. Will's father, Charles Halloway, is also the library's janitor. He shows the boys some illustrations of Hell from Dante's *Inferno*, but Jim wants to see dinosaur pictures.

Will's father declares that Jim "wears the black ten-gallon hats and reads books to fit," by authors such as Fu Manchu and Machiavelli. That leaves the white-hat books to Will, people like Gandhi and Buddha. Jim scowls and asks what all this talk about white and black hats is about. Will's father responds that a long time ago he had to choose which hat he wanted for himself. Jim asks which one he chose. Will's father looks surprised and laughs uneasily, saying, "Since you need to ask, Jim, you make me wonder." He sends both boys home.

Charles Halloway watches the boys run off together towards home and compares the two of them in his head. He considers Jim "all bramblehair and itchweed," while his son Will is "the last peach, high on a summer tree." Charles turns the lights out at the library and locks up, and stops at a corner bar for some coffee. A customer is talking to the bartender about when alcohol was discovered by humans, about how tenth-century

Italians thought that they had discovered the "Elixir Vitae," or the Elixir of Life. The customer offers Charles a drink, but he declines.

## Part 1: Chapters 1, 2, and 3 Analysis

Will and Jim grow up next door to each other, and appear to be inseparable friends. They are like two sides of the same coin, like light and dark. Will was born one minute before Halloween and is blond, friendly, talkative, and quick to action. Jim was born one minute into Halloween and has darker hair, is quiet and slow to move, and seems to know more than he is telling. The salesman appears out of nowhere, gives them a mysterious object with ancient writing and symbols on it, and leaves again, warning them of an unusual storm approaching.

The theme of Will and Jim as light and dark, or as opposite sides of the same coin is expanded. It is made clear that the boys love to dive into other worlds in their imaginations through the books in the library. Will's father also appears to love books more than almost anything else. He is more aware of the two boys' light and dark characteristics than they are. He also confirms for the reader that Will is the light side and Jim the dark side, although the boys do not seem to be aware of this yet.

Charles watches the boys run off and feels a twinge of something lost inside himself, relating to his long-gone innocence and childhood. We learn still more about the makeup of the two boys and the light-dark dichotomy. Charles understands that Jim intuitively *knows* something important with his body, if not in his mind yet, although he doesn't specify what that knowledge is. In Charles's view, Jim has an innate knowledge of how to counter the blows that life brings, while Will is going to keep getting knocked down and never understand what hit him.



# Part 1: Chapters 4, 5, and 6

## Part 1: Chapters 4, 5, and 6 Summary

The boys run through the center of town. It is Friday night, and the courthouse clock strikes nine. Between the time the clock bell starts ringing and the time it finishes, it seems to Will that the entire town pulls down the shades, turns off the lights, and locks up. The town is dead quiet after that.

They come upon a wooden Indian outside the cigar store. The storeowner greets the boys, but then freezes with his mouth open, listening to something far off in the distance. Will shivers and the boys run away and come to the barbershop. The barbershop owner begins crying while locking up for the night. He smells cotton candy, which brings back childhood memories. Nobody around town sells cotton candy anymore. As he moves to switch off the barber pole with the moving stripe, Will asks him not to, mesmerized by the stripe with no end or beginning. The barber also recognizes the pole as if for the first time, and agrees to leave it running all night. Will feels a sense of comfort that it will continue circling while he sleeps.

Charles Halloway, who is Will's father, is about to leave the corner bar when senses something unusual outside that makes the hairs on the back of his hand stand up. All he sees is a man across the street putting up big posters on telephone poles using a bucket and brush. Although it is October, the man is whistling a Christmas tune, which takes Charles back to bittersweet childhood memories of Christmas. Charles feels compelled to go across the street for a closer look. The man smiles and gestures at Charles, who is startled when he notices that the man's palms are covered with silky black hair.

The man walks away. Inside a previously empty storefront, there is a six-foot-long block of ice resting on two sawhorses. A sign in front says, "THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD!" Charles sees no woman inside the ice, although on further inspection, he sees a hollowed-out space in the shape of a woman. The sign also indicates that this is part of "Cooger & Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show." Charles remembers seeing similar exhibits from traveling magicians' shows as a child, and stands engrossed for a long time staring at the block of ice, unable to pull away.

As Will and Jim are walking home, Jim stops and is drawn down a particular street as if under a spell. Will reluctantly follows. They climb a tree and look through a window into the Theater. Will reflects on the mysterious words and actions that take place there, and how much of it he does not understand. Jim's face is flushed and his eyes are blazing, totally enthralled by what they are watching. Inside, a group of people are taking off their clothes and reaching out to each other. Will is frightened and alarmed by the sight and the laughter coming from inside, and falls out of the tree. Will pleads with Jim to leave, but Jim makes fun of Will for being so frightened, calling him a "darn old dimwit



Episcopal Baptist." They walk home separately, Will walking very quickly and vowing not to look back.

## Part 1: Chapters 4, 5, and 6 Analysis

There is an ongoing sense that something unusual is about to happen to the town, with the boys in the middle of it. Continuing from the last chapter, the barber intensifies the theme of lost innocence and forgotten childhood memories, triggered by the smells of licorice and cotton candy for the first time in thirty years.

The reader is getting the idea that the arrival of this traveling show might be the source of some of the strange feelings and nostalgic memories that are affecting the town's residents. The adults, especially, are being flooded with old memories of childhood scenes and lost innocence. Charles has trouble pulling himself away from the spectacle.

Everything that happens to the boys has a sinister and otherworldly quality to it. In this case, it may merely be the forbidden sight of a group of naked adults titillating the young adolescents. The reader may be surprised at such an occurrence in a small Midwestern town, expecting an explanation in chapters to come.



# Part 1: Chapters 7, 8, and 9

## Part 1: Chapters 7, 8, and 9 Summary

Jim catches up to Will on the walk home, and they both laugh, their tension eased. The wind is coming up, and a piece of paper catches against Jim's leg. They grab it, and it turns out to be a poster advertising Cooger & Dark's show, coming October 24. Jim is excited and completely enthused by all the exhibits named on the poster, including the Lava Drinker, Mr. Electrico, and the Demon Guillotine. Will is less enthusiastic and somehow troubled by the poster, and tells Jim to shut up. Secretly, Will decides that he wants to go, too. They both hear calliope music in the distance, and comment on how carnivals don't start at night; they normally arrive at sunrise. They also comment on how odd it is for a carnival to show up this late after Labor Day.

Will's teeth chatter as he thinks about the smells of cotton candy and licorice they noticed earlier, and the effects on the barber and the cigar store owner. With surprise, they both notice that they have arrived home, and they each go into their respective houses and slam the door.

Will enters his house, where his mother and father sit near the fire. His mother is knitting and his father is reading. His father is holding a crumpled piece of paper in his hands. Will recognizes by the color that it is the same poster for Cooger & Dark's carnival that he and Jim had just been looking at. When his father sees Will's flash of recognition, he is embarrassed and stuffs the paper down the side of his chair's cushion. As Will walks upstairs, his father puts the crumpled paper into the fire.

After going to bed, Will listens through the wall to his parents talking, as he sometimes does. He can't speak to his Dad most of the time, but listening to him talking on the other side of the wall gives Will a peaceful feeling. His father is talking about how old his son makes him feel. As Will drifts off to sleep, he thinks he hears his father sneaking out to go back to the library to be with his broom and books.

Meanwhile, Jim lies in his bed, remembering a time when he was three-years-old and almost died. Jim is described as a boy who "talked less and smiled less as the years increased." Jim's mother comes into the room, and upbraids him for leaving the window open when it is so cold. His mother's concern comes from Jim being the only surviving child of the three children she had. The reader also learns that Jim's dad has been gone for a long time. After his mother leaves, Jim raises the window and looks outside to see whether the storm is approaching. He considers knocking the lightning rod off the roof just to see what will happen.

## Part 1: Chapters 7, 8, and 9 Analysis

Jim openly embraces all that the carnival represents, the exotic and dark elements represented by the strange people such as The Skeleton and The Illustrated Man. The



freaks are not allowed to be part of mainstream society. Will feels uncomfortable and consciously tries to resist, but inside he admits to himself that he is attracted to this shadow world just as much as Jim is.

Will finds out that his father has the same fascination with everything that the carnival represents, but like Will, he is embarrassed and wants to hide his enthusiasm. Will is upset that his father won't tell his mother about the carnival. Will feels that "Something's going on. Oh, something *is* going on!" The reader gets a clear premonition that something supernatural or otherwise out of the ordinary is going to happen soon.

Jim is described as someone who is overly aware of the ways of the world, becoming darker as the years go by. He is wise beyond his young years (but in a negative sense, the text implies). He is excited and welcomes the coming "storm." Will remains the polar opposite of Jim, and is younger than his years, due to his willfully innocent attitude towards life.



# Part 1: Chapters 10, 11, and 12

## Part 1: Chapters 10, 11, and 12 Summary

Just after midnight, the lightning-rod salesman walks down the empty main street downtown and comes across the storefront that Will's father saw earlier, where the most beautiful woman in the world is frozen in a block of ice. The salesman is breathless at the sight, reminded of similar women he saw during his journeys through Europe. He remembers seeing women like this on the big movie screens when he was a child. He knows for certain that if this woman in the ice were to open her eyes, he would know already what color they were. The salesman steps back out into the street, and snow is now falling.

The night passes with the courthouse clock striking each hour. Both Will and Jim are awakened at three o'clock a.m. by the faint sound of a mournful calliope, followed by the noise of a train. Will and Jim both look out their bedroom windows with binoculars and see that it is an old train with a steam locomotive bringing the carnival into town. Extremely excited, Jim gets dressed and slides down the drainpipe to go watch them set up. Will tells him to wait and hurries to follow Jim.

As Jim runs toward where the carnival is setting up, Will runs after him, trying to catch up, yelling for him to wait. Will realizes that he always talks, while Jim acts. The two boys find the calliope and are shocked to realize that it seems to be playing itself. The train whistle sounds eerie and otherworldly, and both boys cover their ears in fright. Then all is silent. There seems to be nobody on the train.

Then someone alights from the locomotive, and shadowy figures emerge from the other cars and put up the tents for the carnival. Normally a carnival is lively and full of noise, but Will is struck by how this one is all silence and shadows as it is being set up. When they are finished, the site is again empty and silent, except for the canvas in the tents flapping in the wind. Jim and Will are suddenly spooked by the scene, and run home as fast as they can go.

## Part 1: Chapters 10, 11, and 12 Analysis

It becomes increasingly obvious that there is something dark, sinister, and otherworldly about this carnival. Its presence casts a spell on those who see and hear it. The lightning-rod salesman is transported back to a lifetime of memories when he comes upon the woman frozen in the block of ice, as was Will's father in the same situation. Jim is obviously attracted to the spectacle, as he is with most things dark and mysterious, while Will is frightened initially and wants to avoid it. However, he always ends up reluctantly following Jim, unable to stop himself.



# Part 1: Chapters 13, 14, and 15

## Part 1: Chapters 13, 14, and 15 Summary

Will's father is in the library and sees the two boys running home from the carnival site in the middle of the night. He cries out their names, but not aloud. He looks towards the carnival grounds and is extremely tempted to go there himself. Instead he leaves the library and heads towards home. He passes the same storefront where the two sawhorses that supported the block of ice are now standing empty. The ice has melted, leaving only puddles on the floor, along with a few long strands of hair.

Mr. Halloway arrives home, mumbling "three" over and over. Will, already back in bed, wonders if his father had also seen the train come in. He is frightened by the thought, although he doesn't know why. Charles is wondering why the train arrived at three in the morning. He muses about how the hour of three o'clock a.m. is the darkest hour of the day, when "the soul is out" and "you're the nearest to dead you'll ever be save dying." Charles looks at his wife sleeping peacefully and is jealous of her serenity, while he is bothered by the uncertainties of life in the middle of the night.

The sun comes up, and the two boys look out their windows at each other. Nothing has changed "except the look in Jim's eyes." Will wonders out loud whether last night really happened or not. The two boys run down to the carnival and are disappointed to find that it looks like a regular carnival, with no sign of the mysterious evil that they felt the night before.

The boys see Miss Foley, one of their teachers, who greets them and declares her intention to enter the Mirror Maze nearby. Will feels uneasy for some reason and urgently warns her not to go in. Jim is fascinated by the fact that Will has sensed this before he has. The teacher goes into the maze, and Jim starts to mock Will for being so nervous. Suddenly, Jim stops and says that the hairs on the back of his neck are standing on end, "just like in the stories." They see a dozen Miss Foleys reflected in the mirrors, and watch as she becomes more and more distraught.

With difficulty, the boys manage to pull Miss Foley out of the Mirror Maze. She babbles disconnectedly about a lost young girl she saw "drowning" in the maze, who must be saved. Upon further questioning, she says that the girl she saw was herself as a young girl. She finally calms down and leaves the boys. Will says he is leaving, but Jim insists that they stay until after sundown in order to unravel this mystery of the Mirror Maze.

## Part 1: Chapters 13, 14, and 15 Analysis

Will's father, in his analysis of the symbolism of the hour of three in the morning, makes it clear that the carnival train's arrival at that time is no accident. The carnival is turning out to be something mysterious and sinister, and the boys are drawn to solve its mystery, almost in the manner of an old Hardy Boys book (hence Jim's reference to the



hair standing up on his neck being "just like in the old stories"). All the adults that come under the spell of the carnival see images of their lost childhood. Jim and Will, being just barely out of childhood themselves, are not affected in the same way, and can investigate more objectively.



## Part 1: Chapters 16, 17, and 18

### Part 1: Chapters 16, 17, and 18 Summary

After tearing through the carnival all day having fun, at sunset Will realizes that Jim is nowhere to be found. After looking around for a while, he figures he knows where Jim is, and finds him at the Mirror Maze. Jim is halfway in and halfway out, with a dazed look in his eyes. Over Jim's protests, Will urgently pulls Jim away from the mirrors. Jim has obviously seen something in there, but cannot say exactly what it is. Will is scared and wants Jim to follow him home for supper. Jim insists that they must come back after dark. Will doesn't want to come along, but Jim pleads with Will to never leave him, and Will agrees.

While walking, the two boys stumble over a leather bag on the ground. They realize that it belongs to the lightning rod salesman. The boys decide that this bag represents everything that the salesman owns, and that it would take something unimaginably important for him to forget his bag and disappear. They return to the maze entrance. Will imagines all the other boys their age who are at that time sitting down to a normal supper in normal houses.

Jim ignores an out-of-order sign on the merry-go-round and climbs aboard, ignoring Will's protests. A large figure emerges from the shadows and picks both boys up by the collar, one with each hand. Another figure, tall and slender, also emerges from the shadows and orders that the boys be put down. It turns out that the two men are Cooger and Dark, the proprietors of the carnival show.

Mr. Dark, the tall and slender figure, does all the talking. He gives Jim a business card. Dark tells the boys that the carnival is closed, but to come back tomorrow for a free ride, when the merry-go-round is fixed. The boys run away, but Jim climbs up a nearby tree and pulls Will up with him, where they can spy on the carnival while remaining hidden.

Will and Jim watch while the supposedly broken carousel starts up. To their surprise, the ride begins running backwards, and the music is also playing backwards. While Mr. Cooger mans the controls, Mr. Dark leaps onto the running carousel and gets on a horse. As the boys watch in astonishment, Cooger (who looks to be about forty-years-old) grows younger and younger each time the ride circles around. After a while, the ride stops and Cooger gets off, now twelve-years-old.

### Part 1: Chapters 16, 17, and 18 Analysis

The boys are being pulled deeper and deeper into the mysterious world of this carnival, with Jim always enthusiastically leading the way, and Will reluctantly but inevitably following him. Mr. Dark talks directly to Jim the whole time and never looks at Will. Jim and Dark recognize each other as kindred spirits, or else Mr. Dark recognizes someone who is vulnerable to his powers. Jim continues to become more and more absorbed in

the energy field exuding from the carnival show. Will is dragged reluctantly along, more and more worried that he will lose Jim to some place where he will not be able to follow.



# Part 1: Chapters 19, 20, and 21

## Part 1: Chapters 19, 20, and 21 Summary

Jim and Will agree that they both counted twenty-eight backward revolutions of the merry-go-round while Mr. Cooger was riding and growing younger. They try to figure out a rational explanation for what they just saw, such as there actually being two different people on the carousel.

Jim and Will run in the direction that the twelve-year-old Cooger has run. They go through the center of town, past the barbershop, and realize that they are on the street where their teacher, Miss Foley, lives. At Miss Foley's house, they see a boy who looks about twelve looking out from the upstairs window at them. Will figures it must be the visiting nephew Miss Foley was telling them about at the carnival, but Jim insists that he looked in the boy's eyes, and he saw Mr. Cooger's eyes.

The two boys decide to ring the doorbell and see the boy close up. Will is extremely scared, but Jim is not, to the surprise of both of them. Miss Foley answers the door and is pleased to see them, and welcomes them inside. She introduces the boy as Robert, her nephew from Wisconsin. Jim and "Robert" eye each other calmly and warily, while Will is afraid to make eye contact with the strange boy. Robert invites the two boys to join him and his aunt at the carnival. Jim wants to go, but Will keeps inventing excuses for why they need to go home instead. Jim is annoyed but goes along with Will. They finally agree to meet by the sideshow the next day.

When the boys get to their respective homes, both are yelled at by their parents and sent upstairs without supper. The boys bide their time in their rooms. Around ten o'clock, his father unlocks the door to Will's bedroom. Will hopes to have a good talk about what is going on in town, but all his father says to a bewildered Will is "be careful." His father leaves the house, heading for the library.

Will throws small pebbles at Jim's window to get his attention, but for the first time ever, Jim does not answer. Will continues waiting for a sound from Jim's window calling to him. Finally, Jim's window opens, but he slides down the drainpipe and into the night without a word to Will. Shocked and hurt at being left behind, Will leaves his room and runs after Jim, trying to keep up. They both come to a stop in front of Miss Foley's house.

## Part 1: Chapters 19, 20, and 21 Analysis

These chapters are mostly from Will's point of view. They examine his fraying relationships with both his father and Jim. The adults that come into contact with the carnival are being taken back to their youth (in the case of Mr. Cooger, apparently quite literally). Will is still a child entering adolescence, and is scared by all the changes



taking place in the personal relationships that he takes for granted. He is comforted by the stability of his life, which seems increasingly threatened.

Will is used to being a sort of Siamese twin to Jim, doing everything together and being inseparable. Now Jim has taken off for an illicit nighttime adventure without telling Will. Meanwhile, Will also desperately wants to connect with his father in some meaningful way. Will's father also seems to want a connection, but always stops short, feeling an unbridgeable gulf between them. This gulf may be psychological and exist only in the father's mind, but he cannot seem to get past it.



# Part 1: Chapters 22 and 23

## Part 1: Chapters 22 and 23 Summary

Will, staying out of sight, watches Jim stop in front of Miss Foley's house and call softly up to the window where the nephew is staying. Will becomes increasingly agitated and jumps out, grabbing Jim to try and stop him. Jim, surprised, protests that Will is going to "ruin everything." Will punches Jim hard in the nose, and the two fight down on the ground.

The nephew throws things from the upstairs window down at the boys. It turns out to be some of Miss Foley's necklaces and other jewelry. With the valuables lying on the ground around the boys, he begins yelling "Police!" over and over, and knocks over a couple of garbage cans to wake the neighborhood. Miss Foley looks out her window and recognizes Will and Jim, as well as her jewelry, and assumes that they have turned into thieves.

All three boys run towards the carnival site, Will and Jim chasing the "nephew." The nephew has started up the merry-go-round and gotten on, but it is moving forward this time. The sight hypnotizes Jim. Will thinks Jim is also about to jump onto the carousel and tackles him to the ground again. Will tries to shut the carousel down, but Jim stops him, and they struggle some more. Meanwhile, the nephew is growing one year older with every revolution of the carousel.

During their scuffling, Will and Jim have damaged the switchbox for the carousel, and the boys lose count of how many times the ride goes around. The switch box is spitting sparks and fire. Finally, the whole thing blows up and the carousel comes to a halt. The figure who had been the nephew lies on the ground, looking to be around 130-years-old, cold to the touch and apparently dead. Will vomits and both boys run off, terrified.

## Part 1: Chapters 22 and 23 Analysis

A couple of points of no return are reached in these chapters. The "nephew" has cleverly arranged it so the boys are marked as thieves, and nobody will believe any of the wild things they say about the carnival from now on. When Jim spits on Will's face to protest Will's butting into his business, the phrase "Will mourned" is used. Will realizes that things have changed between he and Jim, and they can never be the same again.

Seeing Mr. Cooger become so old and possibly dead brings Jim at least partially out of his hypnotic attraction towards the carnival. He is as scared and unsettled as Will is at this point.



# Part 1: Chapter 24

## Part 1: Chapter 24 Summary

After running for a while and arguing about what to do, the boys finally find a pay phone in a closed gas station and call for the police and an ambulance. They ride to the carnival grounds, where to their dismay the merry-go-round looks perfectly normal, with no sign of the dead Mr. Cooger. Jim yells and the lights suddenly come on. The group enters a nearby tent, where the entire collection of freaks and other carnival workers are hanging around.

Will spots the dead Mr. Cooger sitting in an electric chair near Mr. Dark. He also realizes with a shock that one of the sideshow dwarves is the lightning rod salesman whose bag they found abandoned on the carnival grounds. Mr. Dark explains to the police and medics that they are just in time to watch a rehearsal of their newest act. With a great flourish and many effects, Mr. Dark pulls a switch to turn on the electric chair. The dead man slowly comes back to life, but just barely. The policemen are laughing and enjoying themselves, believing that the boys were just frightened by the realistic carnival act. The boys are convinced that this is all too real, and are terrified of what will happen next.

## Part 1: Chapter 24 Analysis

The reader may not be sure at this point whose perception of events is correct and "real." The adults in this chapter, the policemen and emergency medics, represent the rational elements of society and the human mind that want to control events. They look at the carnival freaks and their show and see a harmless, entertaining "act" that they can enjoy because they do not think it is real. The two boys have no doubt that it is as real as can be, and the carnival represents to them all the scary, unknown things about life.

The boys are on the cusp of adulthood, and must soon deal with these realities of life as cold, hard facts. Ironically, they are the ones that can actually see the horrors for what they are, while the adults representing positions of authority and control are completely fooled and blind to what is really going on.



## Part 2: Chapters 25, 26, and 27

### Part 2: Chapters 25, 26, and 27 Summary

Miss Foley reflects upon how her house is always completely covered with mirrors, with "bright shadows of herself." She feels that there is something in the mirrors that she should be paying more attention to, but she is afraid that would upset the equilibrium of her life. She considers what to do about the three boys (Will, Jim, and her nephew) and places a call to the library. She tells Will's father to meet her at the police station in ten minutes.

One of the medics mentions carefully that the old man did look dead in that electric chair. The policemen assume he's joking, and the medics decide not to push the matter. Will and Jim lie to the policemen about their real names and where they live, and they are dropped off at a couple of dark houses near the police station where they claim to live. The boys wait until the police car is out of sight, and then discuss what they have just seen.

The merry-go-round fascinates Jim because he wants to grow up immediately and be twenty-years-old instead of thirteen. Will is once again worried that Jim will abandon him. The boys hear familiar voices coming from the police station nearby: it is Will's father and Miss Foley, talking about the apparent jewelry theft.

Will decides to step into the light and show himself. Jim protests, but it is too late. Miss Foley declines to press charges, and Will's father escorts the two boys home. After Jim goes inside, Mr. Halloway comments that he does not think Will is guilty. Will confirms this, but laments that nobody in town will believe them now. After his dad asserts that he believes his son, Will begins to tell him about what happened at three in the morning the other night, but thinks better of it and stops cold.

### Part 2: Chapters 25, 26, and 27 Analysis

While in the Mirror Maze earlier, Miss Foley had her world thrown severely off balance, and barely made it out intact. Now, she notices the surplus of mirrors in her house that are always reflecting her own image back to her. She feels there is something important inside her that she should be looking at, but she is comfortable with her life and is afraid that looking too closely will upset things as they are and make her uneasy. She does not want to take the risk.

Here the reader first learns part of the reason Jim is so fascinated by the carnival. He wants to fast-forward his life so he can skip the rest of childhood and adolescence and go straight to adulthood. This is partly because he is already wise beyond his years, and partly because he is attracted to the dark and unseen areas that are inside every person.





The early losses of Jim's father and his siblings force him to grow up more quickly. Will's father would like him to remain a child, because Will's father painfully misses the freedom and innocence of his own childhood, and he wants to at least watch Will keep his for as long as possible.



## Part 2: Chapters 28 and 29

### Part 2: Chapters 28 and 29 Summary

Sitting on the front porch, Will and his father have a deep philosophical discussion at 1:30 in the morning. Will wants to know whether he (Will) is a good person, and he wants to know why his father is not happy. Mr. Halloway tells him that it is time Will learned that being good and being happy do not necessarily go together. Will's father tells his son that he must go back into the house the way he came out (climb up the outside ladder). Will convinces his father to climb up with him, and they sit breathless at the top, having a moment of bonding.

Will falls into a deep sleep. An hour later he suddenly awakes and sees that the lightning rod atop Jim's house is gone. Will is worried and scared that the carnival people will come and find the two boys. Will and Jim both look out their bedroom windows and see a mysterious hot-air balloon floating in the air above their houses. They see the Dust Witch from the carnival riding in the gondola.

After the balloon leaves, they boys climb up on Jim's roof and see that the witch has left a large, shiny mark on the roof to indicate where the boys live. Will gets a garden hose and washes it off.

### Part 2: Chapters 28 and 29 Analysis

Will's father explains some of his life and his philosophy to his son. Mr. Halloway is unhappy because he has spent his whole life struggling to be "good," and missing out on many fun experiences along the way. He is expressing the dilemma between taking care of responsibilities, and being able to stop and enjoy oneself along the way. He may be suggesting that people who try too hard to be good all the time are misguided, since humans are all imperfect beings, and that way the sinners get to have all the fun.



## Part 2: Chapters 30, 31, and 32

### Part 2: Chapters 30, 31, and 32 Summary

Will decides he needs to do something about the witch and her balloon before she and the others from the carnival come back and do harm to him and Jim. Will grabs a bow and arrow from his room. Guessing that the witch has psychic powers, Will tries to call her back using his thoughts.

The balloon turns and heads back towards Will's house. Will suddenly realizes he doesn't want it to land there, so he runs towards a house he knows is empty. When he gets there, he draws the balloon closer, but the witch seems to sense he is up to no good, and they play a cat-and-mouse game for a while. Suddenly, the balloon is right outside the window. Will manages to put an arrow in it, falling out of the window in the process and landing unhurt in a tree below. The balloon loses air and blows back towards where it came from.

The next morning it rains and thunders. Jim and Will leave their houses to head for the carnival. Jim recalls a dream he had of a funeral parade through town that included a coffin forty feet long. When he went up to look into the coffin to see what kind of creature could be that length, he described what Will recognized as the witch's balloon that he had deflated the previous night.

As they walk, the boys hear what sounds like a little girl crying. Jim gets nervous and wants to go on, but Will investigates. They do not recognize the girl at first, but after looking into her eyes they realize it is their teacher, Miss Foley. She has taken a backwards ride on the carousel. She is hysterical and frightened, since nobody will believe her story. Will tells her to stay put and they will come back with help.

The boys hear the sounds of the merry-go-round, apparently working again and playing its familiar backwards music. Then the boys hear the sounds of a parade, and they realize it is the carnival parading through town. They assume that the carnival freaks are searching for the boys. They hide in some bushes while the parade passes and then go back to where the little girl was, but there is no sign of her now.

### Part 2: Chapters 30, 31, and 32 Analysis

The long-anticipated storm has finally arrived after so much delay. Exactly what this signifies for the boys and the town the reader does not yet know, but the thunder and lightning suggest that some sort of climax is about to be reached.

The roles of Jim and Will have reversed now. Jim is the one who wants to ignore the strange happenings and get away. Ironically, it is a small girl that spooks him, seemingly the most non-threatening creature imaginable. Will, who has up until this point usually followed Jim's lead, now takes action and wants to help the little girl/Miss Foley.



## Part 2: Chapters 33, 34, and 35

### Part 2: Chapters 33, 34, and 35 Summary

Will calls his dad at home to tell him that he and Jim have to hide for a day or two and won't be home. When Mr. Halloway asks for more explanation, Will merely says that "*They're* looking for us," but refuses to elaborate and hangs up. Mr. Halloway puts on his coat and hat and heads outside to look for them.

As the parade passes by the cigar store downtown, Will and Jim are hidden beneath an iron grille in the sidewalk in front of the store. A five-year-old boy drops his gum through the grille and looks for it through the grate. He sees Will and Jim and calls for his mother. The little boy finally gets called away by his mother, but not before his cries attract the attention of the carnival's dwarf (who used to be the lightning rod salesman). He peers down into the darkness where the boys are, and seems to be taking photographs with his eyes, but says nothing. The dwarf is finally distracted by the merriment of the children on the street and leaves.

Mr. Halloway is in the bar in the next block having a cup of coffee. Mr. Dark comes into the bar and stares at Will's father. When the barkeep asks him what he wants, he says he's looking for two boys. Mr. Halloway casually gets up and pays for his coffee and leaves. Will and Jim recognize Mr. Halloway as he walks past above their heads. Jim almost calls out, but Will restrains him.

Mr. Halloway buys a cigar in the store and stands on the sidewalk above the grille, trying to light it as he decides what to do next. He then spots the boys below, and asks them what they are doing there. Mr. Dark emerges from the bar and walks toward Will's father, as the boys frantically impress on Mr. Halloway the need to not give their location away. Mr. Dark informs Mr. Halloway that two lucky boys have won tickets to the carnival, and Mr. Halloway merely needs to identify them. Mr. Dark shows his hands, where an illustration of Jim's face is tattooed on one hand and Will's face on the other. Mr. Halloway feigns ignorance and tries to distract Mr. Dark with small talk for a while.

The blind, psychic Dust Witch that Will thought he had killed in the balloon shows up. She is sensing where the boys are and is about to zero in on them, but Mr. Halloway keeps breaking her concentration by loudly intruding on the conversation and offering cigars. Finally, by blowing cigar smoke at Mr. Dark and the witch, he annoys and distracts them to the point where they angrily give up and walk away. Will's father, being careful not to look down at them, tells the boys to keep hiding until seven and then to meet him at the library, while he tries to put together a plan.

### Part 2: Chapters 33, 34, and 35 Analysis

When the boys are hiding beneath the sidewalk and they see Mr. Halloway walk past over their heads, Will restrains Jim from calling out to him. Will thinks about how very

short his father seems, and he thinks of his father as just another boy like himself. Will thinks one more boy will just get in the way and do them more harm than good.

After Mr. Halloway expertly deflects Mr. Dark's investigations and saves Jim and Will for the time being, Will thinks about how tall his father looks. Mr. Halloway himself is not sure where his ability to handle the situation came from. He seems to have pulled some ability out of nowhere that he didn't know he had. He has moved from aimless child to responsible adult, both in his own and in Will's eyes.

The carnival freaks obviously have some supernatural powers. For instance, although the Dust Witch is blind, she has great psychic powers and can sense where people are and even what they are feeling. Even though he had never met him before, Mr. Dark seemed to know that Mr. Halloway knew Jim and Will. On the other hand, there are limits to their powers, as shown by how Mr. Halloway defeated their search for the boys merely by blowing cigar smoke in their faces and distracting them with small talk.



## Part 2: Chapters 36, 37, and 38

### Part 2: Chapters 36, 37, and 38 Summary

As if retrieving a stored photographic image in his head, the dwarf suddenly remembers seeing Will and Jim hiding under the sidewalk grille and goes to tell Mr. Dark. Dark rushes to the grille, but is furious to find that the boys have fled.

Mr. Halloway wanders through the carnival grounds observing everything he sees. He sees the Mirror Maze but narrowly avoids being sucked inside. He goes to the library and spends hours looking through books describing the history of carnivals and circuses, as well as information about the occult, mirrors, and other related subjects. He acutely felt the boys' fear while they were hiding under the sidewalk, and he knows that something evil is hiding within the carnival.

After hiding in various places around town, the boys finally reach the library after sundown. Will's father lets them in and insists they tell him the entire story of what they have been through. They start with the lightning rod salesman's arrival and tell him everything.

Mr. Halloway says he believes everything that the boys have told him. He then shows them some yellowed newspaper clippings showing a carnival with the very same name of Cooger and Dark that has been showing up in town once every twenty or thirty years since 1846. The boys protest that it can't be the same people from that long ago. Mr. Halloway then shows them an old religious tract describing "the autumn people," for whom summer never comes.

### Part 2: Chapters 36, 37, and 38 Analysis

These chapters mark a turning point in the novel. A quote from Shakespeare reveals the source of the book's title. This signals that the exposition part of the story has now finished, and the reader is heading into the climax and end of the story. Mr. Halloway now knows the full story from the boys and is fully involved in their plight. He intends to help them out of their predicament. Through his library research, Mr. Halloway has also pinned down more precisely who and what these carnival people are. They apparently are souls trapped in a type of purgatory.

The symbolism of the seasons of the year is brought into play again. Mr. Halloway compares the young and fresh-faced Will and Jim as being in their summer, while older folks like himself spend more time in autumn, although he admits that there is always some summer left to balance things out. The carnival folks are stuck in autumn, like zombies in an old horror movie.



## Part 2: Chapters 39 and 40

### Part 2: Chapters 39 and 40 Summary

In the library, Mr. Halloway decides that the carnival people do not "hold all the cards," and that they are as afraid of Mr. Halloway and the boys as they are of the carnival people. Will's father describes the carnival's method as zeroing in on the weaknesses of the people they encounter and then taking their souls through manipulation and deception. Mr. Halloway talks at great length to the boys, describing how the carnival snares people looking for escape from their sins and the harsh realities of life as one gets older and faces mortality. Then, as he finishes talking and decides that it is time to formulate a plan, they all hear the front door of the library open. Someone (or something) enters. Will's father tells the boys to hide, and he sits and waits for whoever it is.

### Part 2: Chapters 39 and 40 Analysis

Mr. Halloway delivers a long monologue to the boys that is a transition between the unfolding of the story and the final confrontation between the two sides that is about to begin. The boys don't understand half of what Mr. Halloway is saying, but Will instinctively feels that somehow the act of his father explaining all this stuff will save all three of them from the evil that the carnival represents.

What Will's father is talking about can be compared to Carl Jung's theory of the psychological shadow, which states that each person has a hidden dark side consisting of the thoughts and feelings that he or she hides from conscious awareness. These dark energies are stuffed into the subconscious, where they simmer like a boiling pot with the lid clamped down, and they finally boil over. Mr. Halloway thinks that the carnival freaks are physical representations of each person's worst tendencies when they were "regular" people. For instance, the Fat Man may have been a glutton for all kind of sensory pleasures, and the Gypsy Dust Witch may have always lived in the future and ignored the present, and so is now condemned to live her carnival life seeing other people's futures.



## Part 2: Chapters 41, 42, and 43

### Part 2: Chapters 41, 42, and 43 Summary

The intruding stranger in the library identifies himself to Mr. Halloway as Mr. Dark. Mr. Halloway speaks with him while the boys hide in the book stacks of the library. Dark seems to be able to read Halloway's mind. Dark invites Halloway to come ride the merry-go-round and become twenty or thirty years younger. Halloway desperately resists the temptation, while Dark mocks him. Dark threatens to use the witch to cause Halloway's heart to stop, making it look like a natural death. As Dark heads into the stacks calling for the boys, Halloway feels dizzy and drops to his knees.

Dark slowly wanders through the rows of shelves tauntingly talking to the terrified boys while they hold their breath and wait. Dark tries to get under Will's skin by saying that Will's mother took a ride on the merry-go-round that evening and is now two hundred-years-old. Dark describes Will's mother's sounds of anguish and despair when she saw herself in a mirror. Following the sounds of Will's sobbing, Dark finds where Will is hiding.

Dark also finds Jim hiding nearby, and he easily picks up both boys, one in each hand. The boys struggle and yell for Mr. Halloway, who manages to get up and comes at Dark. Dark frees up one of his hands and grabs one of Halloway's hands and squeezes it until the sound of breaking bones is heard. Dark takes the boys to a window and tells them to look. Will sees his mother and Jim's mother strolling casually down the street in front of the library, both looking healthy and normal. They have just come from the church next door to the library.

The witch comes forward and casts spells to sew the boys' eyes, ears, and mouths shut. Dark orders the witch to "stop the janitor's clock," and the witch heads into the library while the boys are marched down the front steps outside.

### Part 2: Chapters 41, 42, and 43 Analysis

Mr. Dark finds where Will and Jim are hiding by zeroing in on one of Will's most vulnerable points. Will wants to protect his mother's happiness and innocence about all that is going on. When Dark claims that Will's mother has been turned into a two hundred-year-old monster by the carnival's merry-go-round, Will gives his location away through his involuntary sobbing.

Mr. Dark and his minions seem to hold all the cards at this point. Dark has enough physical strength alone to overpower Mr. Halloway and the two boys, with plenty to spare. The Witch is able to cover the boys' eyes, ears, and mouths while they are being held hostage, and she is apparently going to kill Mr. Halloway, making it look like death from natural causes. This is a low point of the book for the heroes, as the villains seem to have all the power and momentum on their side.





## Part 2: Chapter 44

### Part 2: Chapter 44 Summary

The witch wanders through the shelves until she finds Mr. Halloway. She starts to talk to him, working a spell to slow down his heart and stop it. Mr. Halloway, in a daze and great pain, is tempted to give in and allow himself to die. Then he opens his eyes and really looks at the witch, giggling involuntarily. This seems to throw the witch off balance for a moment. He wonders why he is laughing at a time like this. Then he is struck full on by the basic absurdity of his life and how nothing really matters in the long run. He begins laughing loudly and for a long time at the spectacle of the witch tickling the air with her fingers as she works her spell. The witch acts as if the laughter is burning her and she finally retreats, running out of the library and slamming the door. Mr. Halloway rests for a bit reflecting on what just happened, and then gets up to go look for the boys.

### Part 2: Chapter 44 Analysis

Mr. Halloway is confronted here by what appears to him to be a nameless evil about to kill him. As long as he keeps his eyes shut he feels his case is hopeless, and is ready to give up and let the witch kill him, but when he suddenly opens his eyes and looks directly at the evil in front of him it strikes him as ridiculous, and the simple act of refusing to take it seriously vanquishes the witch. The author is not saying that evil does not exist, but rather that it often exists only as a creation in a person's mind. This evil is given power only by the force of people's imaginations, and that power can be taken away when people choose not to continue giving it.



## Part 3: Chapters 45, 46, and 47

### Part 3: Chapters 45, 46, and 47 Summary

The carnival parades through town with a spellbound Jim and Will under Mr. Dark's control. The boys are unable to yell or otherwise indicate their need for help. When they pass Mr. Tetley in front of his shop, Mr. Dark operates the boys like robots and instructs them to turn their heads towards Mr. Tetley and smile. Mr. Tetley waves and smiles back. It appears to the townspeople that the boys are simply having fun participating in the carnival's parade.

Arriving at the carnival grounds Mr. Dark marches the boys into the Mirror Maze and to the Wax Museum inside and commands them to sit and stay there. Customers wandering through mistake them for two wax figures. Outside, Mr. Dark attracts a crowd by announcing the last free show of the night, the World Famous Bullet Trick.

Hobbling and injured, the witch finally arrives at the carnival grounds. She is supposed to be the one shot at during this show, but she is weak from her encounter with Mr. Halloway at the library and protests to Mr. Dark that the show be stopped. Dark is angry that Mr. Halloway is still alive and insists that she do the show anyway. Dark asks for a volunteer from the crowd to shoot the rifle. When no one answers he is about to terminate the show when Mr. Halloway, who has made his way to the grounds and is at the back of the crowd, speaks up and volunteers.

Mr. Halloway makes his way to the stage. Mr. Dark notices the witch tremble slightly. Mr. Dark comments to the crowd that Mr. Halloway only has one good hand, and so cannot handle a rifle. Mr. Halloway responds that he will do it with one hand anyway, to the cheers and laughter of the crowd that has grown enthusiastic about the spectacle. Mr. Halloway suddenly yells for a boy in the crowd to volunteer to help him. When no one answers, he says his son Will is present and begins calling his name. When there is no response, the crowd begins to yell for Will also, laughing and cheering. Suddenly Will appears at the entrance to the Mirror Maze and walks to the stage, still in a zombie-like state.

Mr. Halloway calls to Mr. Dark for the bullet. Mr. Halloway uses a knife to draw a crescent moon on the bullet to mark it as his. He looks at the witch and silently mouths his own spell on her, that the crescent moon drawn on the bullet is really his own smile. He and Will get ready and fire the gun.

### Part 3: Chapters 45, 46, and 47 Analysis

Will and Jim are under an evil spell and cannot yell for help or run away, but they do whatever Mr. Dark tells them to. Meanwhile the townspeople cannot see anything wrong with the carnival. It all looks perfectly normal to them, like two boys out having fun with



the carnival. The boys inhabit a completely different reality than the townspeople, but the townspeople cannot see that.

This climactic chapter is reminiscent of many old Western stories and movies where the hero gunslinger dramatically appears at the last minute for a showdown with the villain. Once again, the regular folks in the audience are totally blind to the dramatic life-and-death battle between good and evil going on in front of them. The audience just sees regular life going on, a harmless carnival sideshow, as they laugh and cheer for Mr. Halloway.

Somehow Mr. Halloway's calls for Will manage to summon him from the Mirror Maze, although he is still in his robotic trance. In this case the crowd unwittingly plays an important part. The crowd's energy and noise also calling Will's name seems to make the crucial difference in compelling Will to move. Mr. Halloway is not consciously aware of all that he is doing. Some deeper part of him seems to be following a script written elsewhere. He has the momentum now.



## **Part 3: Chapters 48, 49, and 50**

### **Part 3: Chapters 48, 49, and 50 Summary**

At the sound of the shot the witch screams and falls to the ground. At the same time, Will and Jim both wake up out of their trances. The crowd becomes agitated, wondering what has happened. Mr. Halloway knows that the witch is dead, although he is not sure what killed her. Mr. Dark yells at the crowd that everything is fine and that the show is over, and everyone should go home. The carnival lights begin to flicker and go out.

Mr. Halloway and Will run towards the Mirror Maze to rescue Jim. After they are inside the maze the lights go out and it is pitch black. Will finds a match in his pocket and lights it. Mr. Halloway is momentarily spooked by the multiple reflections of himself, but lets out a loud laugh. This causes all the mirrors in the maze to crack and collapse with a huge racket. Jim is nowhere to be found inside the maze, so Will and his father head outside. The lights are still out, but the moon gives them enough light to see.

### **Part 3: Chapters 48, 49, and 50 Analysis**

Once again, Mr. Halloway manages to extricate himself from a crisis situation by rising above it by using humor and seeing the essential absurdity of everything. He sees multiple images of himself in the Mirror Maze as an old, defeated man, but laughs in defiance and brings the entire maze crashing to the ground. Mr. Halloway seems more and more sure of himself and in charge of the situation with each success against the carnival freaks. The more he accepts his life as it is, good and bad, the more personal power he has and the less power the carnival freaks have over him.



## Part 3: Chapters 51 and 52

### Part 3: Chapters 51 and 52 Summary

Will and his father search the carnival grounds for Jim. They hear the music of the merry-go-round, but they cannot tell if the ride is moving backwards or forwards. They pass the carnival freaks, who just stand and watch Will and his father go by, making no move to stop or run after them. Will realizes from the sounds of the music that the carousel has been going backward, but it stops and is now going forward. Will wonders what Mr. Dark is up to.

Will and his father arrive close to the carousel where they see Jim walking slowly towards the ride, still in some kind of trance. Jim climbs aboard, Will running after him and calling his name. Will misses grabbing him and Jim rides around once before Will's cries wake him out of his trance. Jim is terrified, both wanting to be on the ride and wanting to get off.

Will manages to grab Jim's hand, but ends up being pulled onto the ride so that they are both riding around now. Will finally pulls Jim off the ride and Jim falls to the ground and lies there, not moving. Mr. Halloway gets to the control box and turns the ride off. Will wonders if Jim is dead.

A small boy runs up and yells that he needs help, trying to get Mr. Halloway to come with him. Mr. Halloway walks a short way with the boy and begins to question him. Mr. Halloway becomes suspicious and rips the boy's shirt off, revealing extensive tattoos. The boy is Mr. Dark after taking a backwards ride on the carousel. He is trying to lure Mr. Halloway away to some bad end, so he can go back for Will and Jim. Mr. Halloway holds the boy in a tight grip with his one good hand, and the boy/Mr. Dark collapses on the ground, poisoned by the innate goodness of Mr. Halloway.

### Part 3: Chapters 51 and 52 Analysis

Jim is facing his final temptation. Still partly in his trance, he is drawn towards the carousel, which Mr. Dark has started up to attract Jim and the others. Jim is hypnotized, as he has been for most of the story, by the promise that he can move ahead in time and instantly enjoy the benefits of adulthood without going through the necessary steps in between.

Will's cries to Jim not to leave him behind finally wake Jim up. The tight bond of friendship between them wakes Jim up, but Jim is still torn between staying on and getting off the ride. While trying to pull Jim down, Will ends up on the ride with him briefly. Now that he is reunited with Jim, Will is also partly torn between staying on and getting off. Since Will has never been as affected by the ride's charms as Jim, Will manages to pull the both of them off the ride.



Mr. Dark's last desperate maneuver is to appear as a small boy and try to split up Will and his father. By this time Mr. Hallway is no longer easily fooled, and quickly sees through the small boy's disguise. Mr. Hallway essentially suffocates Mr. Dark with his goodness. Mr. Dark calls Mr. Hallway evil, because that is how it appears to him. Mr. Hallway's essential goodness is poison to Mr. Dark, and he crumples to the ground.



## Part 3: Chapters 53 and 54

### Part 3: Chapters 53 and 54 Summary

As Mr. Halloway watches the young boy who was Mr. Dark die, Will desperately tries to revive Jim. When Mr. Dark passes away the carnival freaks all stir and wake up, fleeing the grounds. All the tents and other structures collapse with a great commotion. Jim shows no signs of life, lying on the ground. Will begins to cry. His father angrily commands him to stop crying, finally slapping Will's face to get his point across, saying that tears will only feed the evil energy of the carnival.

Instead, Will and his father start jumping up and down, singing, playing harmonica, laughing. They are trying to be as silly as possible to break the spell of death that Jim is under. With much effort Will finally joins his father, and after a while they collapse in an exhausted heap, sore from laughing. Jim wakes up and sees the bizarre spectacle of Will and his father dancing and singing like lunatics. He joins in the laughter, and the three of them race home.

### Part 3: Chapters 53 and 54 Analysis

Will's father knows that to always be sad and feeling sorry for oneself is a self-indulgence that feeds energy to the negative mindset of the carnival inhabitants. He is so sure that it's a matter of life and death (in order to save Jim) that he even hits his own son to snap him out of his crying spell. Once again, Mr. Halloway (aided by Will) manages to reverse the evil done by the carnival by laughing, dancing, and getting lost in the joy of being alive.

Will's father also knows that although Mr. Dark and the carnival are gone, the evil represented by them can manifest in many forms and can return at any time. Mr. Halloway asserts that it may already be present, unknown to them. After the three realize that they are still attracted to the idea of getting on the merry-go-round, they realize that the evil is actually inside each person, not an outside phenomenon.



# Characters

## Will Halloway

Will is the main character in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, although Jim and Mr. Halloway certainly have leading roles. When the story begins, Will and his best friend Jim are almost two sides of the same coin: best friends, almost the same age (just short of fourteen-years-old), and inseparable. At the beginning Will tends to be a more introverted and thoughtful type, compared to Jim. As the story goes on Will becomes more and more part of the action, as when he pulls Jim off of the carousel. At the end of the story he is the one to help save both his father and Jim, while Jim is unconscious and near death. Although Jim seems to be the more headstrong of the two, Will proves to be courageous and stubborn when it comes to defeating Mr. Dark and saving his friends and family.

Besides being more intellectual than his friend, Will is empathetic to those around him. He constantly thinks about his father and wonders about the deep sadness his father seems to harbor. Will worries about Jim making the wrong choices about riding the carousel, although part of this is Will selfishly not wanting to lose the people in his life. Will is in no hurry to grow up, unlike Jim. In one sense, Will is the light side to Jim's dark side.

## Jim Nightshade

Jim is a much more impulsive boy than Will. While Will is more likely to think things through first, Jim seems to go wherever his gut feeling and intuition take him. In a sense, Jim is the dark side (as is implied in his last name) to Will's light. Jim seems to instinctively protect himself from anything that can hurt him. Unlike Will with his intact family, Jim has lost his father and several brothers and sisters. Maybe partly because of this, Jim is strongly attracted to the promise of freedom and autonomy promised by the instant carousel ride to adulthood. Jim is also very stubborn, and once he has his sights set on the carousel ride nothing that Will says or does will discourage him.

Jim is intuitively more in touch with his "dark side," or his psychological shadow. Mr. Dark recognizes this immediately in Jim and does all he can to draw Jim to the carousel, while taunting an anguished Will, who is powerless to stop Jim. Jim's ability to focus and his strength and stubbornness can be very useful qualities, but in the case of the carnival they almost prove to be his undoing. Having lost his father, Jim tries to keep everyone at an emotional distance without consciously realizing he is doing it. This quality partly accounts for Jim's stubborn attraction to the carnival ride, and his ignorance of the danger to himself and the hurt he is causing those around him. By the end of the story, Jim has woken up and become wiser about himself and his relationship to those close to him.





## Charles Halloway

Charles Halloway is Will's father. When the story begins, Charles is fifty-four-years-old and feeling alienated from life because of his age. He does not think that he can relate to his son, Will. Charles thinks that because of his age he can no longer connect with the joys of being alive that he remembers from his youth. He feels weighed down with the cares of middle age. Charles spends much of his time in the local public library, where he is the janitor. The library and its books are a refuge for Mr. Halloway, especially late at night when the library is closed and he is the only one there.

In the early part of the story, Mr. Halloway remains emotionally distant from both boys, and unaware of their discovery of the strange happenings at the carnival. Once the boys convince him that the evil is real and present Mr. Halloway somehow draws upon previously unknown inner resources, and instinctively knows what to do in a number of dangerous situations. He takes command and finally defeats Mr. Dark and the carnival and saves both Will and Jim. In the process, Mr. Halloway grows younger and more alive, connects with his youthful energy, and forges a much closer relationship with his son. At the same time, Mr. Halloway becomes comfortable with his age and place in life, losing the urge to ride the carousel backward (as Jim wants to ride it forward).

## Mr. Dark

Mr. Dark is the leader of the carnival and the main villain and embodiment of evil in the story. He is also known as the Illustrated Man, his official character in the carnival show, because he is covered head to foot with a variety of colorful tattoos. Mr. Dark and the rest of the carnival freaks get their nourishment from other people's fear and pain. He possesses superhuman physical strength and the ability to psychologically manipulate and control people. Only Will and Jim, and later Mr. Halloway, seem to be aware of Mr. Dark's true nature. The rest of the townspeople only see the surface reality of a regular carnival visiting their town. Mr. Dark finally meets his match in Mr. Halloway at the end of the book, defeated by the latter's intrinsically good nature.

## Mr. Cooger

Mr. Cooger is the other leader of the carnival along with Mr. Dark, and is just as dangerous and evil. Cooger plays a very small role in the second half of the book after he rides too far forward on the carousel and becomes an ancient and decrepit old man. Earlier in the story, Cooger rides the merry-go-round backward in order to become a small boy, and poses as Miss Foley's visiting nephew. Seeing him at Miss Foley's house cements Will and Jim's idea that something very sinister is going on at the carnival grounds.



## The Witch

The witch is the most sinister and prominent carnival freak in the story after Mr. Dark. The witch is blind but possesses great psychic powers. Her personality and soul is as ugly and shriveled as her physical appearance. The witch functions as Mr. Dark's assistant, and does some of his dirty work for him. She is assigned the task of stopping Mr. Halloway's "clock" in the library, but it turns out that the witch's power only works on those who believe in it. Mr. Halloway openly laughs at her, and she is badly injured by his ridicule. Her powers are severely diminished, and Mr. Halloway finishes her off later at the carnival.

## Miss Foley

Miss Foley is an unhappy older woman who lives alone. Mr. Cooger transforms into a little boy and convinces her that he is her nephew Robert, and draws her to the carnival and onto the merry-go-round, where she becomes a little girl again. She still has the knowledge she had as an older adult, however, and becomes the frightened little girl that Will and Jim meet later on.

## Will's Mother

Will's mother and Charles Halloway's wife makes few appearances in the story. She seems to be happy with her life. Both her husband and her son love her and think about her a lot, but she is oblivious to what is happening with them and the carnival, and Will and his father deliberately keep her in the dark about it.

## Mr. Tetley

Mr. Tetley owns the United Cigar Store in the center of the small town where Will and Jim live, and the story takes place. He makes brief appearances several times throughout the book, mostly to be an innocent observer of whatever Will and Jim are going through. He is a representative of the townspeople who cannot see the evil below the carnival's festive surface that Jim, Will, and Mr. Halloway are experiencing all too clearly.

## Mr. Crosetti

Mr. Crosetti owns the barbershop in town. Early in the story, he tells Will and Jim that he smells cotton candy, predicting the arrival of the carnival. The idea of the carnival makes Mr. Crosetti nostalgic for his childhood. Soon, a sign on the door of his shop says he is closed due to illness, and he makes no more appearances. It is possible that he was lured onto the carousel, although this is never made clear.



## Objects/Places

### Green Town, Illinois

The town where the boys live and the story takes place is called Green Town.

### The Lightning Rod

Will and Jim purchase a lightning rod from the traveling salesman and put it on the roof of Jim's house, although Jim takes it down later, to Will's frustration.

### Rolfe's Moon Meadow

Rolfe's Moon Meadow is the place at the edge of town where the carnival sets up. It is so called because "town couples came out to see the moon rise here over a land so wide, so long, it was like an inland sea, filled with grass in spring, or hay in late summer or snow in winter ..." (page 37).

### The Library

Mr. Halloway works as the janitor at the library and spends a lot of time reading. It is also where he, Will, and Jim encounter Mr. Dark.

### The Mirror Maze

The Mirror Maze is an attraction at the carnival that sometimes shows people things they do not want to see.

### The Balloon

A main mode of transportation for the Dust Witch from the carnival, she uses the balloon it to drift silently over the town as she searches for Will and Jim.

### The United Cigar Store

Owned by Mr. Tetley, with a wooden Indian in front, the cigar store makes several brief appearances throughout the story.



## **The Carousel**

The carousel is a ride at the carnival that makes people become older or younger by riding it.

## **The Barbershop**

Mr. Crosetti owns the barbershop. It is of significance only because a sign in the window, saying the shop is closed due to illness, arouses suspicion in Will and Jim, who wonder if it's connected to the carnival freaks somehow.

## **Ned's Night Spot**

Ned's Night Spot is the local watering hole where Mr. Halloway is a regular, although he is never seen drinking anything stronger than coffee. It is also the first place where he meets Mr. Dark directly and talks to him.

## **Wax Museum**

The Wax Museum sits at the very end of the Mirror Maze. Jim and Will are stashed there by Mr. Dark after the witch puts an immobilizing spell on them.

## Setting

Something Wicked This Way Comes takes place in Green Town, Illinois, in October. Against the backdrop of a "normal" American small town, Jim and Will discover that not everything is as it seems. The carnival, which changes the atmosphere of the town soon after its arrival, is filled with familiar sideshows —the Freak Tent, the merry-go-round, and the mirror maze. By juxtaposing the mundane and the fantastic, Bradbury gives the reader the opportunity to relate to the setting before he introduces the "wicked" elements into his plot.



## Social Sensitivity

Something Wicked This Way Comes is Gothic fantasy at an extreme. It may be frightening to some young adults; the novel takes place at a carnival, however, which tends to be somewhat surreal on its own. Bradbury comments on realistic issues, as well. He expresses an understanding of the family. Will's father questions the nature of childbirth and the responsibility that is placed on the mother. More than anything, the novel relates the positive aspects of friendship and the often difficult process of growing-up.

# Literary Qualities

Bradbury's use of ornate, elaborately metaphoric language reaches its extreme in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and, as in many of his stories, those metaphors are required to carry a heavily allegorical freight. Characters with last names like Nightshade, Dark, and Halloway move through a realistically detailed, but frequently symbolic landscape. Jungian archetypes and Gothic transformations abound. Nothing is quite what it seems. Critics who appreciate the novel have argued that it is much more complex, and much more complexly structured, than its denigrators realize.



# Themes

## Age

Age is an important theme occurring throughout the book. Many of the characters in the book are obsessed with their age, either feeling nostalgic for when they were younger or impatient for reaching the golden land of adulthood more quickly. On the very first page of the book in the Prologue, the reader is introduced to Will and Jim and informed of their ages, including the number of months and days. The point seems to be that both boys are very close to turning fourteen. This impatience for reaching the next milestone marker (which is just an arbitrary human-created measuring point) is characteristic of the impatient Jim, who is tired of childhood and wants to grow up more than anything.

At the other end, Will's father Mr. Halloway is fifty-four-years-old, and at the beginning of the book he feels every day of it. While Will and Jim want to move forward in time, Mr. Halloway is nostalgic for the youthful energy and optimism he remembers in himself when he sees the boys. He feels alienated from his own son because he thinks he is forever cut off from that energy, and so has no common ground with Will.

At the carnival the focus of the evil is the carousel ride, which is a time machine that takes its riders forward or backward in time at the rate of one year per revolution, depending on which direction the ride is going. The carousel exerts a strange and irresistible attraction to a number of the characters in the story, including the normally levelheaded Will and his father.

## Attention

One of the more subtle themes in the novel is how people choose, either consciously or unconsciously, what they notice and pay attention to in their environment. There is so much information constantly bombarding the human brain that it is necessary to only allow a small fraction of that information to filter through to conscious awareness. Otherwise, nobody could function in everyday life. One of the odd things in the story is how Will and Jim, and later Mr. Halloway, are so intensely involved in a life-and-death struggle with Mr. Dark and the evil he and his carnival represents, while nearly everybody else in the town only sees the routine, innocent pleasures of a carnival visiting their small town.

When Will and Jim are marched down the main street of town as part of the carnival parade, they are under the Dust Witch's spell and cannot move or speak unless commanded to by Mr. Dark. Mr. Dark tells the boys to wave and say hello to Mr. Tetley, and Mr. Tetley cannot see anything wrong. He simply sees a couple of boys getting to march in the carnival parade on their way to play on free rides. Towards the end of the story, when Mr. Halloway volunteers to shoot the bullet at the witch on stage, there is a





huge contest of wills battling between Mr. Halloway and the witch, with Mr. Dark as an interested observer.

Both Mr. Dark and Mr. Halloway act for the benefit of the crowd as if nothing unusual is happening, and nobody in the crowd seems to be the wiser. Even when Will comes out of the Mirror Maze at his father's call, still mostly under the hypnotic spell put upon him by the witch earlier, the crowd sees nothing amiss. Only when the witch drops dead is there some suspicion in the crowd that something out of the ordinary has taken place, but even then Mr. Dark is able to calm their fears and send them on their way home.

## Acceptance

Another major theme in the book is that of acceptance of one's place in life. Mr. Halloway is unhappy because he thinks that he should be someone other than who he is. He feels old, that life has passed him by, and that he is not a good father to Will. Jim is impatient and wants to jump ahead to twenty years of age without going through the necessary steps in between. Will wants everything to stay just like it is and resists the inevitable changes that are constantly occurring in life.

Mr. Cooger and Mr. Dark prey on these vulnerabilities. They have an uncanny ability to instantly spot who is most vulnerable and zero in on their insecurities. Mr. Dark calls to Jim to come onto the ride while taunting Will at the same time, who cannot stop his friend from coming under Dark's spell. The lightning-rod salesman and Miss Foley cannot resist the carousel either, with the result that they are both transformed permanently into grotesque freaks. The mostly self-imposed ugliness that they feel in their souls and psyches is represented by their bizarre physical appearances. Miss Foley goes mad because she has her middle-aged mind in a small girl's body. Mr. Halloway finally finds happiness when he simply lets go and accepts his life and his world as it is. This also gives him new life, both figuratively and literally, as his realization enables him to fend off the witch's curse through laughter.



## Themes/Characters

Based on the short story "Nightmare Carousel" (1962), *Something Wicked This Way Comes* has been enormously popular, but has been widely criticized for the self-indulgence of its language and the weakness of its plot structure.

The novel focuses in part on the nostalgia for midwestern small-town childhood that Bradbury treated in his earlier non-fantasy novel *Dandelion Wine*. It adds, however, a strong focus on the theme of maturation and explores some of the darkest fantasies of childhood.

More than any other writer of fantasy and science fiction, Bradbury has remained in close touch with his own childhood. The children who appear in "Homecoming," "The Veldt" (both appear in *The Stories of Ray Bradbury*, 1980), *Dandelion Wine*, and innumerable other Bradbury stories are invariably well drawn, and Jim and Will of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* are no exception. Though imbued with some of the nostalgia that is characteristic of much of Bradbury's work, they are complex and interesting characters, who are basically good, despite their imperfections. The very fact that both boys seem susceptible to the evil that Cooger and Dark's represents gives the novel its tension. Jim and Will are at risk, not just physically but spiritually.

Will's father, Charles, Bradbury's secular version of the holy fool, is easy to like as a person. But his very innocence makes him less successful as a character than the two boys. At times Charles seems simply too good. It's hard to see him as being as thoroughly at risk as the boys are, and this robs the novel's climax of some of its force.

For Bradbury, the great danger of growing up is the loss of one's imagination. When the Pandemonium Shadow Show begins to spread its evil spell through Green Town, only three people appear to be able to come to grips with it. Two of them, of course, are Jim and Will, whose birthdays, one minute before midnight and one minute after midnight on Halloween, clearly symbolize their fitness to deal with a supernatural menace. The third person, and the only adult able to recognize the evil, is the aptly named Charles Halloway, Will's father and the janitor at the town library. Charles is an intelligent man who has chosen, in the opinion of Green Town's more somber citizens, to read and daydream his life away. He is a man who has in some ways never grown up.

By carefully contrasting Charles Halloway, the apparent failure who can see the truth, with the other adults in Green Town, Bradbury seems to be making the point that much of what the world thinks of as maturity is, in fact, nothing of the sort. Rather it is a kind of half-life, a form of arrested development.

Cooger and Dark entrap people by offering them their fondest dreams, by promising to fulfill all the petty desires, and end all the frustrations they've built up over the years. Those whom the town considers mature, the humorless people who work hard and have no time for fun and whimsy, are among the first to fall victim to the Shadow Show's lure because, by giving up the ability to dream, they've given up the ability to change.



Thus they are stuck in their own pasts, unable to come to terms with or outgrow their frustrations. Their souls are stunted and it is only fit that the Pandemonium Shadow Show should turn them visibly into the twisted freaks and dwarfs they already are on the inside.

Charles Halloway, still flexible and possessing a sense of humor, has the imagination to deal with the evil that Mr. Dark represents and, by laughing at that evil, robs it of its power. True maturity is thus redefined by Bradbury as the ability to combine the experience of adulthood with the open-minded imagination of youth.



# Style

## Point of View

The one-page prologue is from a narrator's point of view. Chapter 1 is from the lightning rod salesman's point of view. He is just arriving in town as a stranger and taking stock of the place, much as the reader is just arriving at the story and getting his or her bearings. The majority of the rest of the story takes place from Will's point of view, although several chapters are from Mr. Halloway's point of view. Chapter 9 takes place in Jim's point of view briefly, but mostly what we know of Jim comes from observations by Will and Mr. Halloway. Chapter 10 briefly returns to the lightning rod salesman, before he disappears, and Chapter 25 features Miss Foley.

Some of the chapters featuring both Will and Jim as they investigate Mr. Dark and the carnival are from an omniscient point of view. Sometimes the point of view shifts quickly within chapters. For instance, in a few chapters, the beginning is from a narrator's point of view to frame the current situation, and then it moves to Will, Mr. Halloway, or one of the other characters. Will and his father tell most of the story because they are the most developed characters, and the development of their relationship to each other is a central part of the story. They are also the two characters who think things through and analyze the most, so it makes sense for them to handle the words. Jim is more impulsive and acts more often from his intuition.

## Setting

The entire story takes place in the quiet small town of Green Town, Illinois. The time is the week preceding Halloween. The year is unclear, but probably somewhere in the range of the 1920s to the 1940s. There is an air of nostalgia in the story, as it appears to take place roughly during the time when author Ray Bradbury was the same age as Will and Jim, and so there is likely a good amount of personal experience woven into the details of the story. Early on, the story centers on the two houses occupied by Will and Jim and their families, next door to each other. The library where Mr. Halloway works and spends much of his free time is soon introduced, and plays an important role in the story as it progresses. Several times the story moves to the center of town, usually to show the townspeople going about their daily routines while the battle between Jim, Will, and Mr. Halloway on one side and Mr. Dark and the carnival on the other.

The single most important place, and the location where the climax of the story takes place, is the carnival grounds at the edge of town. This is the setting for the Mirror Maze, the carousel ride, and the main stage upon where Mr. Halloway kills the witch and effectively destroys the entire carnival. Green Town is an archetypal Midwestern small town in the U.S. during the early- to mid-twentieth century, a serene place on the surface, without much crime or excitement. The arrival of a carnival or other traveling show is a highlight for the town, especially for the young and young at heart. The



carnival symbolizes a chance for "regular" people with normal lives to briefly experience sights, sounds, and people that are unusual and slightly dangerous, while being able to safely go back to their normal routines afterward.

## Language and Meaning

The language used by Bradbury goes back and forth between distinct styles. When there is any kind of interaction between people, or during moments of high tension, he uses short paragraphs, many of them a single line, using simple language. This creates a short, staccato rhythm that communicates the urgent, fast pace of these parts of the story. In other parts of the book, Bradbury's characters are in pensive, reflective moods, or thinking about or discussing deep philosophical concepts about life. When this mood takes over, the language can be simple and elegantly poetic. For instance, on page 135, as the reader is brought to the library, it says, "An autumn leaf, very crisp, fell somewhere in the dark. But it was only the page of a book, turning."

At other times a character, usually Mr. Halloway, goes on at length, sometimes for a page or two at a time, with rambling philosophical discourse, which is sometimes interesting and sometimes just disrupts the flow of the story. Bradbury also sometimes uses some very strange metaphors and flowery turns of phrase. For instance, on page 92, Will refers derisively to the carnival freaks as "ulmers" and "goffs," words that are not in the dictionary and remain unexplained. Will and Jim speak to each other in the casual and often ungrammatical speech of adolescents, peppered with quaint-sounding jargon that seems dated to the modern reader's ears. Phrases like "Heck, no!" and "For Gosh sakes!" pop up frequently.

## Structure

The story has a one-page prologue, followed by three books: I, Arrivals; II, Pursuits; and III, Departures. The chapters, most of which are only a few pages, are numbered one through fifty-four, with no titles. New chapters do not start on new pages, but simply start directly below wherever the previous chapter ends, which gives more of a feeling of continuity between chapters. The story is told chronologically, without any flashbacks or other jumping around in time.

The brief prologue sets the stage for the story that follows. It focuses on the time of year (October, just a week before Halloween). It formally introduces the two main characters, Will and Jim, and gives the reader an idea of the atmosphere and mood that two boys of that age are experiencing during the late fall.

The first Book, "Arrivals," shows the arrival of the lightning rod salesman, who acts as a human lightning rod for the "storm" that is coming. Then the carnival arrives. From the beginning, the tone of the story makes it obvious that there is something odd and unsettling about this traveling freak show. Will and Jim investigate and discover what is going on, but they find that none of the adults in town, including the police, believe them or can even understand what the boys are trying to tell them.



In the second Book, "Pursuits," things get hotter for Will and Jim, as Mr. Dark starts actively looking for the boys to put a stop to their investigative activities. Will's father, Mr. Halloway, is convinced of the carnival's evil and begins to help the boys, getting himself in trouble along the way.

The third and final Book, "Departures," is much shorter than the earlier two, and is the climax of the story. Will, Jim, and Mr. Halloway are all captured and under the control of Mr. Dark and the Dust Witch, with no apparent way out. Mr. Halloway discovers the secret to counteracting the witch's evil powers and saves Will and Jim, and defeats the carnival and runs it out of town.



## Quotes

"And that was the October week when they grew up overnight, and were never so young anymore ..." Prologue, pg. 1

"That's Charles William Halloway, thought Will, not grandfather, not far-wandering, ancient uncle, as some might think, but ... *my father*." Chapter 2, pg. 11

"Will watched, wondering why this woman was so happy and this man so sad." Chapter 8, pg. 26

"The train just stood in the middle of the dry autumn field, no one in the locomotive, no one in the tender, no one in any of the cars behind, all black under the moon, and just the small sound of its metal cooling, ticking on the rails." Chapter 12, pg. 37

"The carousel wheeled, a great back-drifting lunar dream, the horses thrusting, the music in-gasped after, while Mr. Cooger, as simple as shadows, as simple as light, as simple as time, got younger. And younger. And younger." Chapter 18, pg. 56

"Running, Will knew he was doing just what the nephew wanted. He should turn back, pick up the jewels, tell Miss Foley what happened. But he must save Jim!" Chapter 22, pg. 72

"Look at me: married at thirty-nine, Will, thirty-nine! But I was so busy wrestling myself two falls out of three, I figured I couldn't marry until I had licked myself good and forever. Too late, I found you can't wait to become perfect, you got to go out and fall down and get up with everyone else." Chapter 28, pg. 99

"For the Dwarf was looking down.

And in his eyes were the lost bits and fitful pieces of a man named Fury who had sold lightning rods how many days how many years ago in the long, the easy, the safe and wondrous time before this fright was born." Chapter 35, pg. 124

"Can they ... ' said Jim. 'I mean ... do they ... buy souls?'

'Buy, when they can get them free?' said Mr. Halloway. 'Why, most men jump at the chance to give up everything for nothing. There's nothing we're so slapstick with as our immortal souls.'" Chapter 40, pg. 149

"There was only one thing sure.

Two lines of Shakespeare said it. He should write them in the middle of the clock of books, to fix the heart of his apprehension:

*By the pricking of my thumbs,*



*Something wicked this way comes.*" Chapter 37, pg. 137

"Why, that if you're a miserable sinner in one shape, you're a miserable sinner in another. Changing size doesn't change the brain. If I made you twenty-five tomorrow, Jim, your thoughts would still be boy thoughts, and it'd show!" Chapter 40, pg. 151

"Mom!" Screamed Will, against the hand, which, anticipating his cry, clamped tight to his mouth.

'Mom,' crooned Mr. Dark, mockingly. 'Come save me!'

No, thought Will, save *yourself*, run!" Chapter 43, pg. 164

"Jim awoke! Circled half round, his face showed now July, now December. He seized the pole, bleating out his despair. He wanted, he did not want." Chapter 51, pg. 199



# Adaptations

A film version of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* was made in 1983.

Directed by Jack Clayton from Bradbury's own screenplay and starring Jason Robards, it received generally poor reviews. The sets and special effects were excellent but critics found the plot confusing and overly sentimental. Indeed, Bradbury's stories are so dependent on language and metaphor for their effect that it might well be argued that the successful transference of much of his work to the screen should be nearly impossible. It is probably not coincidental that *Fahrenheit 451*, the Bradbury story which has been filmed with the greatest success, is also one of the author's most restrained works in terms of language use.



## Topics for Discussion

1. What is the significance of the salesman who comes to sell Jim and Will a lightning rod at the beginning of the novel?
2. Jim and Will realize the wicked nature of the carnival. Why is Charlie, Will's father, the only other character who understands the danger?
3. Some of the characters are named for traits which they embrace. List some of these people and explain why they are named as they are.
4. What is the significance of the lightning rod? Why is it "finely scratched and etched with strange languages, names that could tie the tongue or break the jaw, numerals that added to incomprehensible sums, pictographs of insectanimals all bristle, chaff, and claw?"
5. Discuss Will's relationship with his father.
6. Why are Will and Jim such close friends? Is this purely a small-town phenomenon?
7. What first convinces you that the carnival has an underlying wicked element to it?
8. Jim and Will get accused of robbery by Miss Foley. Will thinks, "No one'll believe anything we say from now on! Not about carnivals, not about carousels, not about mirrors or evil nephews, not about nothing!" How do Jim and Will convince people that they are telling the truth?
9. What is a calliope? What is its significance in the novel?
10. Church bells are mentioned more than once in the novel. Why are they important? Discuss their role in the plot.



## Essay Topics

At the beginning of the book, Will and Jim appear to be two sides of the same coin in some ways. Discuss how they are the same and how they are different.

How does the appearance of the lightning rod salesman at the beginning of the story set the tone for what follows?

What is Will's relationship to his father like at the beginning of the story? How does it change by the end of the book?

What does Bradbury say about the source of evil in the world? Is anyone totally good or totally evil? What realization do the three heroes come to by the end of the story?

Are the carnival freaks responsible for what they do? How does Mr. Dark recruit new freaks for his carnival (like the lightning rod salesman and Miss Foley)?

How is it that Will and Jim can be paraded down the main street of their town in full view as prisoners of Mr. Dark, and to the townspeople, it appears as an innocent scene of boys on their way to have fun? How can different people perceive the same situation so completely differently?

What would happen if there really was a carousel of the type in the story, and anyone who rode it could become as older or younger as they wanted to? What would be some of the likely consequences?



## Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Bradbury places three epigraphs in the front of his book—a line from the poet W. B. Yeats, a proverb, and a line from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Why are they there? How are they relevant to the novel?
2. Time is an issue in this novel. Charlie Halloway says, when he cannot sleep, "We are blind to continuity, all breaks down, falls, melts, stops, rots, or runs away." Read chapter 14, and explain what Charlie means by this.
3. Read *Dandelion Wine* and comment on the novels' similarities. What does each have to say about childhood?
4. In chapter 22, Robert, Will, and Jim are running from Miss Foley. The narrator comments, "And so they ran, three animals in starlight. A black otter. A tomcat. A rabbit." Why are these three boys characterized in such terms. Where else in the novel do animal motifs appear?
5. Charles Halloway hears a Christmas carol in October: Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep!

The Wrong shall fail, The Right Prevail, With peace on earth, good will to men!"

What is the significance of the verse and why is it appropriate that it should appear at the beginning of the novel?

Does it give you a sense of what is to come?

## Literary Precedents

Many mainstream and genre writers influenced Bradbury's work. Of special interest in connection with *Something Wicked This Way Comes* are Poe, such German Romantic writers as E. T. A. Hoffmann and Ludwig Tieck with their frequent symbolic use of mirrors and mysterious transformations, and, most directly, Charles Finney, whose *The Circus of Dr. Lao* (1936) Bradbury had himself anthologized some six years earlier. Dr. Lao is a basically beneficent character, but his circus, like Bradbury's, features a number of supernatural and potentially dangerous attractions. His role seems to be primarily to force those who visit his circus into facing and coming to terms with their own imperfections.

It should also be noted that *Something Wicked This Way Comes* may well be Bradbury's most influential work.

Any number of circus fantasies published over the last two decades show a considerable debt to it, among them Peter Beagle's clearly superior novel *The Last Unicorn* (1968), as well as Tom Reamy's *Blind Voices* (1978), Alan Ryan's *Dead White* (1983), and Al Sarrantonio's *Totentanz* (1985).

## Further Study

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New York: St. Martin's, 1981. General Summary of Bradbury's life and career to 1980. Includes a detailed bibliography of both fantasy and nonfantasy work.



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