

Something Wicked This Way Comes



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RAY BRADBURY

Ray Bradbury was born the third of four children to Esther Moberg and Leonard Spaulding Bradbury in Waukegan, a large city near Chicago, Illinois. Bradbury's family struggled financially during the Great Depression, and they moved back and forth between Waukegan and Tucson, Arizona, before finally settling in Los Angeles, California, when Bradbury was fourteen years old. Bradbury immediately fell in love with Hollywood and frequently snuck into movie theaters and roller-skated throughout the city hoping to catch a glimpse of movie stars. Despite his love for Los Angeles, however, Waukegan remained an important part of his life. For Bradbury, Waukegan symbolized safety and comfort, and it serves as the inspiration for Green Town, the fictional city in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. As a child, Bradbury was an avid reader, and while he initially wanted to be a magician, he began writing at the young age of eleven. He graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1938, the same year he published his first story, "Hollerbochen's Dilemma," in the magazine *Imagination!*

Bradbury did not attend college and openly rejected higher education. He was quoted as saying, "I don't believe in colleges and universities. I believe in libraries." Bradbury sold his first story, "The Lake," in 1942 for less than fourteen dollars, and he began writing full-time two years later after he was denied entrance into the United States military due to bad eyesight. In 1947, he married his long-time girlfriend, Marguerite, the only woman he had ever dated, and published *Dark Carnival*, a collection of short stories, that same year. Bradbury went on to pen over thirty novels, including *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and *Fahrenheit 451*, and hundreds of short stories, poems, and plays. He is the winner of numerous awards and accolades, including the Prometheus Award in 1984 and a Pulitzer Prize in 2007. In 2000, he was awarded the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters from the National Book Foundation and was later made Commandeur of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Government. Bradbury was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2002, and in 2003 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Woodbury University. In 1999, Bradbury suffered a stroke, which severely impaired his mobility, but he continued to write until his death in 2012 at the age of 91. Upon his death, Bradbury willed his personal library to the public library in his hometown Waukegan.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Something Wicked This Way Comes focuses on Cooger and

Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show, a traveling carnival that visits the fictional town of Green Town, Illinois. Traveling carnivals have a long and colorful history within the United States, and while they are often associated with religious observances outside the United States, in America they center around fun and amusement. The Chicago World's Fair of 1893 is credited with sparking America's obsession with traveling carnivals, and after the fair's six-month run in Chicago, several acts and showmen broke off and formed their own shows. Otto Schmidt was one such showman, and after the World's Fair he later founded the Chicago Midway Amusement Company. Several iconic American foods and amusement rides began at early carnivals, such as the Ferris wheel, which debuted at the Chicago World's Fair, and cotton candy, which was first sold at the at St Louis World's Fair in 1904. By 1936, over three hundred carnivals traveled the United States offering a variety of rides, games, and shows to Americans; however, their popularity began to wane by the latter half of the twentieth century, due in part to the emergence of permanent amusement parks and the public's changing views of freak shows and the exploitation of people of animals. Early traveling carnivals were famously managed by unethical, and often illegal, business practices that led to a widespread negative connotation of fairs and carnivals, which is also reflected in the evil of Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show. In 1932, Bradbury met a real-life Mr. Electrico at a traveling carnival. The performer touched a young Bradbury with his sword and ordered him to "Live Forever!" which Bradbury has certainly achieved through his prolific writing career.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Bradbury openly rejected categorizing his work and instead considered his writing "the art of the possible." However, Bradbury's work is often classified as science fiction, and he is credited with bringing modern science fiction to the literary canon. Bradbury was mentored by Bob Olsen, an American science fiction writer who died in the late 1950s. Olsen is the author of many poems and short stories, including "Seven Sunstrokes" and "The Pool of Death." Bradbury was also influenced by H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, and Edgar Allan Poe, whose dark and spooky subject matter is certainly reflected in Bradbury's many horror stories and novels. He was also an avid reader of the classics, including those written by William Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, and John Donne, and this influence can be seen in Bradbury's beautiful and poetic prose. Much of Bradbury's work, including *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, *The Illustrated Man*, and *I Sing the Body Electric*, involve elements of the supernatural, but they also offer a powerful critique of people and society. Other famous works that engage

society and the supernatural include [Frankenstein](#) by Mary Shelley and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Bradbury has influenced and informed many contemporary writers of science fiction and horror. Most notably, American writer Stephen King credits Bradbury, especially *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, with sparking his own interest in the supernatural. Bradbury's influence can be seen in much of King's work, including the novel [It](#) and the short story "The Body," which both focus on coming of age and the choice between good and evil. Erin Morgenstern's [The Night Circus](#) also bears thematic resemblance to Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, as it also takes place at an eerie circus and grapples with the concepts of time, mortality, magic, and love.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Something Wicked This Way Comes*
- **When Written:** 1960s
- **Where Written:** Los Angeles, California
- **When Published:** 1962
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary American Literature
- **Genre:** Horror fiction, fantasy fiction
- **Setting:** Green Town, Illinois
- **Climax:** Will and Charles revive Jim through laughter and silliness after he rides Cooger and Dark's evil carousel and nearly dies.
- **Antagonist:** Mr. Dark
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Bradbury in Hollywood. Ray Bradbury claimed from a young age that he wanted to be an actor, and while he never realized this dream, his impact on movies and television is undeniable. Bradbury was nominated for an Oscar for his work on the screenplay for John Huston's 1956 adaptation of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and in 1994 he was awarded an Emmy for his teleplay of *The Halloween Tree*.

Witches and Warlocks. Ray Bradbury is the seventh great-grandson of Mary Bradbury, a woman who was accused, tried, and convicted of witchcraft during the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. She was sentenced to hang for her crimes, but, luckily, she was not executed before the trials were discredited later that same year. Mary lived to be an old woman, and in addition to Bradbury, actress Linda Hamilton and actor Christopher Reeve are among her descendants.



PLOT SUMMARY

It is one week before Halloween when thirteen-year-old Will Halloway and Jim Nightshade are approached by a traveling lightning-rod salesman named Tom Fury who predicts an epic storm. Mr. Fury has sold over one hundred thousand lightning rods to "God-fearing" customers, and he gives Jim one free of charge and instructs the boy to nail it high on his roof, or else he'll be "dead come dawn." Mr. Fury is quickly on his way, but Will and Jim are left anticipating a natural disaster, and they immediately nail the metal contraption to Jim's roof. The boys then make their weekly run to Green Town's local library, where Will's father, Charles, works as the janitor. At fifty-four, Charles is old enough to be Will's grandfather, and each time Will runs into him at the library it is a "surprise—that old man, his work, his name." After checking out their books, Will and Jim run home through the center of town, and they are confronted by the faint sounds of carnival music and the smell of cotton candy. Then, an advertisement for a traveling carnival, Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show, blows through the air and wraps around Jim's leg, and it is supposed to arrive the next day. Will doesn't believe it—carnivals don't typically come to town after Labor Day—but Jim is hardly able to contain his excitement.

Later that night, Will overhears his parents talking about the carnival, yet he still doubts that one will be coming so late in the year. As the clock on City Hall strikes 3:00 a.m., Will wakes to the sound of a train engine pulling into town and the unmistakable music of a calliope. Will and Jim jump out of bed and race down to the railroad bridge just in time to witness the carnival train pulling a "wailing" calliope with nobody sitting at the keyboard. As the carnival train stops in an open field, a mysterious hot air balloon materializes and hovers over the train, and a man dressed in black steps out of the train's caboose. On his command, the "train comes to life," and as clouds obscure the light of the moon, the circus poles and canvases are erected, inexplicably, almost instantly. By the time the cloud cover passes, the balloon is nowhere to be found. Will and Jim race back home to their beds, and they are convinced that Cooger and Dark's is no ordinary carnival.

The next morning, Will and Jim wake early and run down to the carnival grounds, but despite their chilling experience the night before, Cooger and Dark's appears to be "just a plain old carnival." They boys run into Miss Foley, their seventh-grade teacher, and she is looking for her nephew, who is visiting from Wisconsin. Miss Foley goes into the Mirror Maze to search for him, and she is scared half to death when she sees the reflection of a young girl who looks eerily like herself as a child. The maze attendant guarantees Miss Foley that she was the only customer in the maze, and she goes home to rest. Will and Jim spend the entire day at the carnival, and they visit all the rides and attractions, except for the **carousel**, which has a sign

claiming to be “out of order.” Unable to stay away, the boys snoop around the carousel anyway, and they are confronted by Mr. Cooger, the proprietor of the carnival. Mr. Cooger aggressively snatches Will and Jim off of the broken carousel by the scruff of their necks, but his partner, Mr. Dark, is kind and insists that Cooger put them down. He gives Jim a white business card that magically changes color from green to red, and he promises Jim that it will get him a free ride on the carousel once it is fixed. The boys then pretend to go home, but linger in a tree nearby, and they see Mr. Dark start the carousel—only it is running in reverse. Mr. Cooger then steps on the merry-go-round, and after twenty-eight turns backward, he steps off a twelve-year-old boy. Jim and Will follow Mr. Cooger as he leaves the carnival and goes to Miss Foley’s house, where he is posing as her young nephew, Robert.

Later, Will and Jim follow “Robert” back to the carnival, and when he gets onto the carousel to transform back into Mr. Cooger, Will accidentally knocks the control box. The ride is sent fast, and uncontrollably, forward, and Robert goes around well over one hundred turns. By the time the carousel stops, he is transformed into a decrepit old man. Will immediately calls the police and an ambulance, fearing that they have accidentally killed Mr. Cooger, but when help arrives, Mr. Cooger is posing as Mr. Electrico, one of the human oddities of Mr. Dark’s freakshow. Mr. Dark apologizes for the misunderstanding, and again gives Will and Jim free tickets to ride the carousel, but this time Will and Jim are rightfully convinced of the carnival’s evil—although that doesn’t mean that they don’t still want to ride the carousel and instantly become men.

That night, Will wakes with the sudden realization that Jim has taken the lightning rod off his roof, and suddenly the Dust Witch, Mr. Dark’s most powerful and dangerous freak, floats over the boys’ houses in the carnival’s hot air balloon and marks Jim’s roof with a streak of “evil mercury paint.” Will outsmarts the Witch by rinsing off her mark with a garden hose and then pops the balloon with his arrow, but it is clear that the carnival is actively searching for them, and the boys won’t be able to hide much longer. Will and Jim are no match for the evil of Mr. Dark and his freaks, and they must soon enlist Charles’s help. Charles turns to the books in the library to help defeat the carnival, but when Mr. Dark sends the Dust Witch to stop Charles’s heart and kill him, it seems Charles has no choice but to succumb to death. As the Witch corners Charles, he is struck by the sudden and uncontrollable desire to laugh, and as he collapses into hysterics, the Witch’s evil powers become useless. As Charles is busy fighting the Witch, Mr. Dark closes in on Will and Jim, and takes them back to the carnival to cash in on their free carousel ride.

Luckily, Charles is able to rescue Will, and when Charles volunteers for Mr. Dark’s “World Famous Bullet Trick,” he insists on Will’s help. Instead of his initials, however, Charles

carves a “crescent moon” into the bullet, symbolic of his own smile, and when he fires it at the Witch’s mouth, the happiness that it implies knocks her to the ground, instantly killing her. As Mr. Dark runs off, Will and Charles set off in search of Jim, but they must first pass through the Mirror Maze. Inside the maze, Charles’s reflection is impossibly old, and he doubts his ability to save Jim. However, as Charles sees the reflection of his son behind him, he accepts his age and the death that it implies and destroys the maze with a deafening scream that shatters all the mirrors.

Once outside the maze, Jim is already getting on the carousel, his eyes blank. By the time Charles stops the carousel and Will is able to pull him off, it appears that Jim is already dead. In the meantime, Mr. Dark has transformed himself into a nine-year-old boy named Jed and attempts to lure Charles to his death, but Charles immediately recognizes his disguise. Charles holds the boy close, “almost lovingly,” and poisons Mr. Dark with his goodness and love. Then, in an act of pure silliness, Jim and Charles revive Jim by dancing and singing, knowing it’s the only balm against the horror and fear that the circus breeds. After Jim is revived, Will, Jim, and Charles, run off together happily, away from the carnival grounds.



CHARACTERS

Will Halloway – Jim Nightshade’s best friend and Charles Halloway’s son. Will is the protagonist of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and he serves as the personification of good throughout the novel. He is nearly fourteen years old and was born just one minute before midnight on October 30, which implies that Will is so good, even his birthday is incompatible with the evil connotations associated with Halloween. He has hair “as blond-white as milk-thistle” and eyes as “bright and clear as a drop of summer rain,” and Charles describes him as “the last peach, high on a summer tree.” Everything about Will, from his physical description to his reading habits, reflect his purity and goodness, and he serves as a foil to the dark and conflicted Jim. Despite Will’s inherent goodness, however, he is still not immune to the evil of the carnival, and he must actively resist the wicked Mr. Dark and the temptation of his sinister **carousel**, which reflects Bradbury’s central argument that good and evil are ultimately a choice that must be continually made. Like Jim, Will too desires to escape the confines of childhood and become a man—although Will only wants to ride the carousel three times around compared to Jim’s desired four turns. Will has a complicated relationship with his father, as he finds the man’s advance age (he’s old enough to be Will’s grandfather) and profession as the library janitor embarrassing. Though Will still deeply loves his father, it isn’t until the carnival threatens to destroy them that he is reminded of this. Will helps Charles to overcome his impossibly old reflection in the carnival’s Mirror Maze, which in turn gives Charles the courage

to fight and destroy Mr. Dark. Additionally, it is Will's love for Jim and the importance of their friendship that saves Jim when he decides to ride the carousel. Will risks his own life to pull Jim from the moving carousel, and in this way, Will represents the power of love to overcome even the strongest evil.

Jim Nightshade – Will Holloway's best friend and Mrs. Nightshade's son. Jim was born one minute after midnight on Halloween, and he is described as a boy with hair the color of "dark autumn chestnuts" and eyes as "dark as twilight." Jim serves as a foil to Will, and whereas Will is depicted in terms of goodness and light, Jim struggles with the darkness of the world. He is more drawn to trouble than Will is, and he is prone to punctuating his speech with sharp exclamations of "heck" and "hell." Unlike Will, Jim expects to be hurt in life, and he is constantly "ducking, weaving, bouncing away from the knockout blow which must inevitably come." Jim's father is absent throughout the novel, and while it is never confirmed, it is implied that his father is dead. Jim's two siblings have also died, and he vows to never have children of his own. "No use making more people," Jim says. "People die." The tragic history of Jim's family is reflected in his fear that Will is going to abandon him and leave him to resist the carnival alone, and he makes Will promise that he will always be there to "protect" him. Like Charles, Jim struggles with his age, only Jim longs to be older and escape the confines of childhood, and it is precisely this desire that Mr. Dark and the carnival prey on. If Jim rides Cooger and Dark's **carousel** just "four times around," he can instantly become an eighteen-year-old man. Jim does indeed choose to ride the carousel, and it is his friendship with Will that ultimately saves him. Will risks his own life pulling Jim from the moving merry-go-round, and then he revives him with laughter and silliness. At the end of the novel, Will and Jim run off together as carefree and happy children, which implies that Jim finally accepts his young age and no longer wishes to ride the carousel. With the character of Jim, Bradbury effectively warns against rushing into adulthood, and instead argues the importance of embracing the cumulative nature of age and experience.

Charles Holloway – Will Holloway's father. Charles is fifty-four years old, and he considers himself way too old to be the father of a fourteen-year-old boy. He is described as an "old" and "ancient" man, and even the hairs on the backs of his hands are gray. Charles's wife, Mrs. Holloway, who is ten years younger than he is, also serves to make him feel old, and she is frequently mistaken for his daughter. He believes that a father should run and play with his son, and when he can't, he finds himself wishing that Will was never born. Charles spends many sleepless nights alone in the library across town where he works as the janitor, and Will implies that he is just as ashamed of his father's job as he is his age. Each evening after work, Charles goes to the local bar where he enjoys his "nightly one-and-only drink," which further hints at his deep unhappiness

and implies that he can't go home to his much younger family without first dulling the pain. Despite his sadness, however, Charles is described as a kind and loving—albeit distant—father to Will. After Robert frames Will and Jim for trying to steal Miss Foley's jewelry, Charles goes to the police station to help get them out of trouble and never does tell the boys' mothers. He immediately believes Will and Jim when they tell him about Mr. Dark and the carousel, and he is determined to find a way to save them. Nevertheless, it isn't until Charles accepts his age and mortality that he is able to defeat the Dust Witch and destroy Mr. Dark, which he manages to do with the power of love and happiness. Thus, the character of Charles serves as an example of the power of good over evil, but he also underscores the danger of looking too wistfully back on one's childhood. Once Charles accepts his age, he is finally able to run and play with Will, free of the resentment and deep unhappiness he feels in the beginning of the novel.

Mr. Dark / The Illustrated Man / Jed – Mr. Cooger's partner and one of the proprietors of Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show. He is also the leader of the sideshow freaks and serves as the show's Illustrated Man. Mr. Dark is the antagonist of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and he functions as the personification of evil within the novel. He uses the carnival to lure unsuspecting souls to evil, and once the carnival goes succumb to their desires and the temptation of the carnival, they are transformed into one of Mr. Dark's sideshow freaks. The carnival's sinister **carousel** and its ability to make a rider older or younger depending on which direction it spins is Mr. Dark's main source of temptation, but he also employs the carnival's Most Beautiful Woman to tempt Mr. Fury and turn him into the freakshow's Dwarf. Mr. Dark is covered with tattoos of the pictures of those whose soul he has taken—he even has two new tattoos of Will and Jim on the palms of his hands—and he can inflict pain on others simply by pinching or pulling the corresponding tattoo. While Mr. Dark certainly would be glad to have Will's soul, he is especially intent on tempting Jim to evil, and Mr. Dark twice gives him free tickets to ride the carousel. After Mr. Cooger is transformed into Mr. Electrico, a man well over one hundred years old, Mr. Dark isn't sure that he will survive, and he wants to make Jim his new partner. "Dark and Nightshade, Nightshade and Dark," he says as he tries to entice Jim to instant adulthood. He never does succeed in obtaining the boys' souls, and he is later killed by Charles. After Will pulls Jim from the carousel and saves his life, Mr. Dark transforms into a nine-year-old boy named Jed and tries to escape, but Charles discovers his disguise and destroys him by holding the boy close and poisoning him with goodness.

Mr. Cooger / Robert / Mr. Electrico – Mr. Dark's partner and one of the proprietors of Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show. Mr. Cooger is first introduced as a forty-year-old man, but after riding the carnival's **carousel** backward, he is transformed into a twelve-year-old boy. Mr. Cooger poses as

Robert, Miss Foley's nephew from Wisconsin, but she senses from the beginning that he is an imposter and "doesn't belong," though she can't quite articulate why. When Robert attempts to ride the carousel to change back into Mr. Cooger, Will and Jim accidentally knock the carousel's control box and send the ride forward uncontrollably, and Mr. Cooger is transformed into a decrepit old man well over a hundred years old. As an old man, Mr. Cooger becomes Mr. Electrico, one of the attractions in Mr. Dark's freakshow, who is sparked back to life with one hundred thousand volts via an Electric Chair. Mr. Electrico turns to dust and blows away after the freaks drop him en route to the carousel.

Miss Foley / Aunt Willa – Will and Jim's seventh-grade teacher and Robert's aunt. Miss Foley is described as "a little woman lost somewhere in her gray fifties," and she "loves carnivals." Miss Foley is terrified after she walks through the carnival's Mirror Maze and sees herself reflected as a child, but this doesn't stop her from wanting to ride the carnival's **carousel**. Like Charles, Miss Foley struggles with her age and longs for youth, and she ever refers to herself as an "old fish." Miss Foley disappears, just like Mr. Crosetti and Mr. Fury, and Bradbury implies that she has taken a ride on the carousel. Will and Jim find a scared and abandoned young girl who knows the boys by name, and whom Will believes to be Miss Foley, but this is never confirmed. When Will and Jim return to the place where they found the young girl, she is nowhere to be found, and Charles theorizes that she has become one of Mr. Dark's freaks.

The Dust Witch – A member of Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show and Mr. Dark's most powerful and dangerous freak. The Dust Witch is "blind, but special blind," and while she can't exactly read thoughts, she is able to feel, hear, and taste different souls. Mr. Dark sends the Dust Witch to find Will and Jim in the carnival's hot air balloon, and while she does find them, the boys outsmart her and wash away the evil identifying mark she leaves on Jim's roof. The Dust Witch can also stop the human heart with her thoughts, and it is in this way that she attempts to kill Charles; however, Charles fends her off with laughter and later destroys her with his smile and happiness during Mr. Dark's World-Famous Bullet Trick.

Tom Fury / The Dwarf – A traveling lightning-rod salesman who comes to Green Town the night before the carnival arrives. Mr. Fury gives Jim a lightning rod for free and instructs him to attach it to his roof immediately or be "dead come dawn." Mr. Fury is last seen approaching the block of ice that holds the Most Beautiful Woman in the World, and it is implied that he melts the ice. Mr. Fury later resurfaces as the Dwarf in Mr. Dark's freakshow with his memory wiped clean. Like Will and Jim, Mr. Fury struggles with temptation—his temptation is the beautiful woman, whereas Will and Jim's temptation is the **carousel**—and he pays for this sin with his soul, thereby becoming part of the carnival.

Will's Mother / Mrs. Holloway – Will's mother is never given a name in *Something Wicked this Way Comes*, but she is described as a "good Christian" who is ten years younger than her husband, Charles. Her youth makes Charles feel old, but regardless of her age, Charles describes her as "immortal," like all women who give birth to children. Charles refers to his wife as "a strange wonderful **clock**" who "makes the flesh that holds fast and binds eternity," and because of this, a part of her will live forever.

Mr. Crosetti – Green Town's barber. Mr. Crosetti suffers an attack of nostalgia when he smells cotton candy in the air before the arrival of Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show, and Will fears that Mr. Crosetti has taken a ride on the carnival's **carousel**. Mr. Crosetti's fate is never revealed, however, and while Will tells Miss Foley that Mr. Crosetti has died, Will only assumes this because there is a sign outside the barber shop that reads: "CLOSED ON ACCOUNT OF ILLNESS."

Mr. Tetley – The owner of the United Cigar Shop in Green Town. Mr. Tetley hears faint calliope music in the air the night before the carnival arrives in Green Town, and the iron grille under which Will and Jim hide from Mr. Dark and the freaks is in the street directly outside his shop. Mr. Tetley also sells Charles the cigar that he uses to ward off the Dust Witch by blowing smoke in her face, overwhelming her sharp senses.

Jim's Mother / Mrs. Nightshade – Jim's mother is also not named, and she is rarely mentioned in the novel. She is the mother of three children, but sadly, Jim is her only surviving child. It is implied that Jim's father is also dead, and she wants Jim to have lots of kids when he grows up so that they can all visit her.



THEMES

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



GOOD VS. EVIL

When Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show arrives in Green Town, Illinois, one week before Halloween, local boys Will Holloway and Jim Nightshade can hardly believe their good fortune. But as thirteen-year-old Will and Jim watch the carnival train clamor into town at 3:00 a.m., pulling a singing calliope that has no one at the keyboard, the boys quickly realize that this is no ordinary carnival. Instead of cotton candy and innocent childhood fun, the carnival sells temptation and eternal damnation, and the cost of admission is the human soul. Will and Jim soon find

themselves locked in a battle between good and evil, and after enlisting the help of Will's father, Charles, they set out to destroy their enemy. However, it is not only Mr. Dark and his freaks who pose a threat to Will and Jim; the boys must also fight against the temptation of the carnival's sinister **carousel**, and their own inner desire to escape the confines of childhood and instantly become men. Through the exploration of good and evil in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, author Ray Bradbury argues that there is good and evil in everybody—it is up to each individual to know the difference and act accordingly.

In the novel, Bradbury establishes a dichotomy between the evil of the carnival and the goodness of Will. When Charles explains the carnival to Will and Jim, he likens Mr. Dark and his freaks to “the autumn people,” the evil characters of an old religious story he heard as a child. According to Charles, the autumn people “sift the human storm for souls, eat flesh of reason, [and] fill tombs with sinners.” Like the autumn people, the carnival is full of evil. “The stuff of nightmare is their plain bread,” Charles says. “They butter it with pain.” Mr. Dark and his freaks exist only to hurt people, and they subsist on that pain. Will, on the other hand, is good. Bradbury describes him as a boy with “hair as blond-white as milk thistle” and eyes as “open, bright and clear as a drop of summer rain.” Whereas Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show is described in terms of darkness, Will's description entails lightness and white, which is symbolic of his purity and goodness. The color white is further employed in Charles's explanation of “white-hat books” and “black-hat books.” Black-hat books involve darker themes and characters like Fu Manchu, Machiavelli, and Dr. Faustus, but Will wears a white-hat and reads Gandhi, St. Thomas, and Buddha. Even Will's reading habits reflect his inherent goodness. Will is also a loyal friend and son; he risks his own life and soul to help Jim escape Cooger and Dark's carousel, and constantly reminds Charles that he is a good father. From his physical appearance to his personal preferences and actions, Will is the living embodiment of morals and decency, and he serves as a powerful foil to the depravity of Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show.

However, Bradbury complicates the distinction between good and evil, as the carnival relies on individuals *choosing* to partake in its sinful activities. After Miss Foley, Will and Jim's seventh-grade teacher, becomes trapped in the carnival's evil house of mirrors and sees herself reflected as a young girl, she wishes for youth and willingly rides the carousel. Mr. Fury, the traveling lighting-rod salesman, likewise falls to temptation. When he tries to catch a glimpse of the Most Beautiful Woman in the World, he disappears and later resurfaces as the Dwarf in Mr. Dark's side show with his memory wiped clean. Even after Will and Jim discover the carnival's evil intent, Jim still struggles with his desire to ride the carousel. “I don't think I want any more of that,” Jim says, referring to the carousel. “You

don't *think!*” Will exclaims. “After all *this!*? Good grief, let me *tell* you!” Jim knows that riding the merry-go-round has dangerous consequences—if he rides, he will become part of Cooger and Dark's carnival—but because his desire to become a man is so strong, he still considers it. The carnival is thus more than just simply evil; it latches onto certain desires that *already exist* within those who come across it. This, in turn, reflects the fact that human beings are not entirely good or evil. Rather, individuals have the capacity to be either; if human beings did not have the potential for sin, then the carnival would have nothing to prey on.

Good and evil are ultimately a matter of choice within *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and this choice must be constantly negotiated. Charles claims that Will's goodness will “help when things get really tough,” but this may not necessarily be enough. “And men *do* love sin,” Charles tells Will, “oh how they love it, never doubt, in all shapes, sizes, colors, and smells.” It is precisely this love for sin that Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show seeks to exploit. Still, Bradbury argues, the fight between good and evil is not entirely hopeless. “You don't have to stay foolish and you don't have to be wrong, evil, sinful, whatever you want to call it,” Charles tells Will and Jim. “There's more than three or four choices.” In this vein, Bradbury implies that there is danger beyond that represented by Mr. Dark and his wicked carnival, and even after Charles destroys Mr. Dark, he warns Will that “the fight's just begun.” The carnival won't be coming back, but new threats of evil will surface. “What will they look like? How will we know them?” Will asks his father. “Why,” Charles responds, “maybe they're already here.” Everyone—even the purest of souls—has the capacity for evil in the form of temptation, and it is a constant battle to remain good.



AGE, TIME, AND ACCEPTANCE

Protagonist Will Halloway and his best friend, Jim Nightshade, are both one week shy of their fourteenth birthdays, and while they may be on the cusp of manhood, they are not quite adults. Both enjoy typical children's things, like books about dinosaurs and traveling carnivals, but Jim yearns for the freedom to live outside the restraints of childhood. When Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show comes to town with its mysterious **carousel**, it is the answer to Jim's problems of juvenile angst. Mr. Cooger, the proprietor of the carnival, steps onto the carousel a middle-aged man, and after riding the magical contraption backward, steps off a twelve-year-old boy. If Jim rides the carousel in the opposite direction, he realizes, he can fast forward and instantly become a man. Conversely, Will's father, Charles, is feeling his own fifty-four years, but these feelings are nothing a couple of turns backward on the carousel couldn't cure. However, Jim and Charles quickly learn that riding the carousel comes at a considerable cost: doing so

means that they will become part of Mr. Dark's side show, and their new physical age will be at odds with their actual life experience. With the juxtaposition of old and young in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and the sinister carousel that stands between the two, Bradbury ultimately warns against rushing into adulthood or looking wistfully back upon childhood. Instead, Bradbury argues the value of embracing age and the slow, cumulative nature of experience.

Jim and Charles represent the desire to grow up and turn back the **clock**, respectively. When Jim and Will walk home from the library, Jim wants to linger near a house at the corner of Hickory and Main, where, over the summer, the boys witnessed a couple having sex. Will is embarrassed and doesn't understand what the couple was doing exactly, but Jim longs to again catch them in the act. "Just one last time," Jim begs Will. "You know it won't be the last!" Will responds, suggesting that Jim frequently lingers near the house, hoping to catch a glimpse of the forbidden adult act, which underscores Jim's eagerness to grow up. Charles likewise resents his age, but unlike Jim, Charles wishes he could again be a young man. As Will eavesdrops on his parents' conversation, he hears his father's broken voice. "Will...makes me feel so *old*...a man should play baseball with his son..." Charles longs to be a bigger part of his young son's life, but feels that his advance age prohibits this. Furthermore, it is not only Will's age that makes Charles feel old. Will's mother is also ten years younger than Charles. "And you. Who's your *daughter*? people say," Charles complains to her. Because Charles's wife is so much younger, people assume that she must be his daughter. Each of these examples emphasize Charles and Jim's desire to respectively rewind or fast-forward time.

While Cooger and Dark's carousel can magically make Jim and Charles their desired ages, this instant gratification is not all it's cracked up to be. As Mr. Cooger steps on the carousel to return to his true age, Will and Jim accidentally knock the controls of the ride and send Mr. Cooger flying forward many, many times. By the time the carousel stops, Mr. Cooger has aged over a hundred years and is a frail old man. He later turns to dust and blows away after the side show freaks drop him en route to the carousel. Furthermore, after Miss Foley, Jim and Will's fifty-year-old teacher, rides the carousel, it is implied that she is transformed into a frightened little girl. Miss Foley is now young, but she can't possibly go back to her life—no one would ever believe her outrageous story. By riding the carousel, Miss Foley sacrifices her autonomy and her ability to care for herself, despite her fifty years of wisdom and experience. Miss Foley now belongs to Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show, and her future is uncertain. As Jim struggles with the temptation of riding the carousel, Charles warns him, "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! Or if they turned *me* into a boy of ten this instant,

my brain would still be fifty and that boy would act funnier and older and weirder than any boy ever." Here, Bradbury argues the value of experience, which cannot be gained (or lost) simply by jumping on a magical carousel. These examples highlight the cost of admission for riding Cooger and Dark's carousel, and Jim and Charles must be prepared to pay dearly for their desired age. In this way, Bradbury implies that neither Charles nor Jim will ever be happy until they accept the circumstances of their age.

For Charles to successfully make it out of the carnival, destroy Mr. Dark, and save Jim, he must first accept his age and the inevitable mortality that it implies. Bradbury writes, "All because [Charles] accepted everything at last, accepted the carnival, the hills beyond, the people in the hills, Jim, Will, and above all himself and all of life," he is finally able to live happily, free from the resentment of his age. Jim must likewise find acceptance in the fact that he can't rush into adulthood, and this acceptance is implied as Will, Jim, and Charles run side-by-side away from the carnival grounds laughing happily at the end of the novel. Ultimately, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* warns against the dangers of wishing away time or excessively mourning its loss, and Charles and Jim are not truly happy until they accept this reality.



LOVE AND HAPPINESS

As Will Holloway and Jim Nightshade metaphorically battle evil in the form of Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show, the young boys are at a clear disadvantage. The carnival preys on the boys' curiosity and desires, and while Will and Jim struggle with wanting to ride the magical **carousel** (even though they shouldn't), the danger of Cooger and Dark inches closer and closer. Charles, Will's father, is determined to save his son and Jim, and he turns to the town library for answers. The stacks of books and old newspapers give Charles valuable insight into who, and what, Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show is, but they don't bring him any closer to defeating its evil power. Just as Charles begins to resign to hopelessness and admit defeat, he discovers that only love and happiness have the power to combat the evil of the carnival. Through *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, Bradbury effectively argues the power of love, laughter, and happiness to defeat and overcome even the darkest evil.

When Mr. Dark, the leader of the carnival's evil freak show, dispatches the Dust Witch, his most powerful freak, to stop Charles's heart and clear the path to Will and Jim, laughter proves to be Charles's most effective tool. As the gypsy corners Charles in the library, it seems that all is lost—until Charles begins to laugh. "Why?" he wonders. "Why am I...giggling...at such a time!?" As Charles collapses in hysterics, the Dust Witch retreats, wounded by the implied happiness of his laughter. Charles again goes up against the Dust Witch when he

volunteers to perform Mr. Dark's "World Famous BULLET TRICK!" In this attraction, Mr. Dark provides the volunteer with a rifle and a trick rubber bullet, and when the bullet is fired, the Dust Witch defies death and catches the bullet between her teeth. Instead of his initials, Charles carves a "mysterious crescent moon" onto the bullet, symbolic of his own smile. As Charles fires the rifle, both Charles and Will smile at the Dust Witch. The power of their smiles and the laughter of the crowd causes the witch to turn to dust, and she dies as a result of their happiness, which further reflects Bradbury's central argument of the power of happiness and laughter in the face of evil.

Bradbury furthers this argument when Charles defeats the evil Mr. Dark using only the power of his love. When Mr. Dark disguises himself as Jed, a young, lost boy, and tries to lure Charles to his death, Charles grabs the tattooed boy and holds him, "pressing the boy, almost lovingly, close, very close." Instead of fighting Mr. Dark's evil with violence, Charles embraces the boy and responds with love. As Charles holds Jed close, Jed begins to scream "Murder!" and Charles knows his efforts are working. "I will do only good to you, Jed, Mr. Dark, Mr. Proprietor, boy," Charles says. "I will simply hold you and watch you poison yourself." Charles's "good"—in this case, love—is Mr. Dark's kryptonite. Charles continues to hold Jed "like father and son long apart, passionately met" until the images of the souls trapped in his tattoos begin to "shiver and fly this way and that." As Mr. Dark's tattoos "abandon" his illustrated body, he falls to the ground, dead and powerless. Similar to the Dust Witch, Charles physically destroys the wicked Mr. Dark using only his love, which is in keeping with Bradbury's assertion of the power of love to overcome the darkness of evil.

Bradbury's argument, however, does not end with Mr. Dark's death. After Jim succumbs to his temptation to instantly become a man and gets on the magical carousel, he is ultimately saved by his friendship with Will. Will risks his own life to save Jim from the damning effects of the carousel, which implies that the love of their friendship is also incompatible with the evil of the carnival. What's more, when Charles and Will do manage to pull Jim, unconscious and seemingly dead, from the sinister ride, their attempts to provide him with "artificial respirations" and chest compressions are useless, and Will fears Jim is gone. As Will begins to mourn the loss of his friend, however, Charles drags his son to his feet and produces a harmonica. In a display of pure silliness, Charles and Will dance and "do-si-do, hands extended, the harmonica seeping and guzzling raw tunes" until Jim begins to smile, the silliness of their dance sparking life back into him. Jim's life is effectively saved by love, happiness, and laughter, as Will and Charles's levity outshines the carnival's evil and darkness.



FEAR, THE SUPERNATURAL, AND THE UNKNOWN

[*Something Wicked This Way Comes* begins just one week before Halloween, and the novel is fittingly pervaded by a sense of fear and filled with references to the supernatural. Will Halloway and Jim Nightshade's own names reflect this spooky holiday, which also happens to be Jim's birthday \(Will, for his part, was born just one minute before Halloween\). When Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Show arrives, it is not long before a palpable dread blankets the entire town. Mr. Dark and the carnival rely on the town's natural fear of the unknown, using seemingly unexplainable—and, the thinking goes, unstoppable—supernatural elements to terrorize the town. According to Will's father, Charles, "the carnival wisely knows we're more afraid of Nothing than we are of Something. You can fight Something. But...Nothing? Where do you hit it?...So the carnival just shakes a great croupier's cupful of Nothing at us, and reaps us as we tumble back head-over-heels in fright." It is only after Charles faces Mr. Dark head on and confronts his fears that he can finally defeat the evil of the traveling carnival, and it is in this way that Bradbury effectively argues that fear only has as much power as individuals grant it. The carnival itself further becomes an allegory for fear of the unknown, and it's only by facing that fear—by effectively accepting that certain things cannot be explained or understood—that it can be defeated.](#)

Mr. Dark and his side show freaks rely on the supernatural to threaten Green Town, and they actively terrorize the people. As the carnival pulls into town, a railcar hauls a mysterious calliope that appears to be playing by itself. Will and Jim stare in disbelief as the musical instrument "wails" with no one at the keyboard, chilled and entranced by what appears to be a supernatural event unfolding right before their eyes. Later, when Mr. Cooger, Mr. Dark's business partner, rides on the carnival's broken **carousel** in reverse with Chopin's "Funeral March" playing backwards, the middle-aged man transforms into a boy of twelve. Mr. Cooger stays this way until he again rides the merry-go-round, this time in the opposite direction, and transforms into an old man. The Dust Witch, Mr. Dark's most powerful freak, can stop the human heart using only her thoughts, and she can also "feel" the thoughts of others. Additionally, Mr. Dark too has the power to shift into a younger version of himself, and he even has strange tattoos of Will and Jim on the palms of his hands that inflict physical pain on the boys when he clenches his fists and wrings his hands. Mr. Dark and the freaks instill fear through their use of supernatural power. The supernatural nature of the carnival compounds its terror, which seems to be something inexplicable and uncontrollable.

Furthermore, while Jim, Will, and Charles are convinced that the carnival is responsible for the disappearance of several

people in town, there is an air of mystery that surrounds these disappearances, which implies a fear of the unknown. As Will lays eyes on the Dwarf in Mr. Dark's freakshow, Will is certain that he recognizes him. "I know him," thinks Will. "Oh, God, what they've done to him! The lightning-rod salesman! That's who it is. Squeezed tight, smashed small, convulsed by some terrible nature into a clenched fist of humanity..." Will doesn't know how Mr. Dark has done it, but the Dwarf is clearly Mr. Fury. After Will and Jim find Miss Foley, their fifty-year-old schoolteacher, transformed into a terrified young girl after riding Cooger and Dark's carousel, she quickly vanishes. Bradbury never reveals what happens to Miss Foley after Charles defeats Mr. Dark and the evil carnival and this too adds to the fear of the unknown within *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Mr. Crosetti, the local barber, likewise goes missing when the carnival comes to town. Like Miss Foley, Mr. Crosetti's fate is never revealed. The mystery surrounding all of these events further adds to the story's sense of dread.

Above all, the carnival attempts to frighten its victims through its invocation of the ultimate unknown: death. The carnival notably taps into Charles's own fear of growing old and the sense of mortality that inevitably entails. Charles appreciates the "simplicity" of the carnival's efforts to scare him. "Hit an old man with mirrors," he says, "watch his pieces fall in jigsaws of ice only the carnival can put together again. How? Waltz around back on the carousel to 'Beautiful Ohio' or 'Merry Widow.'" Yet in the end, when Charles destroys Mr. Dark, he does so by denying the fear and power that the carnival has. "Evil has only the power that we give it," Charles says. "I give you nothing. I take back. Starve. Starve. Starve." When Charles finally refuses to believe in the evil of Mr. Dark and the death that he represents, and once he accepts his own advancing age and mortality, Charles is finally able to overcome his fears and defeat the sinister carnival.

steps on the merry-go-round a forty-year-old man, and after twenty-eight turns backward, he steps off a twelve-year-old boy. The carousel also has a magical calliope that plays on its own volition, and when the carousel spins backward, it plays Chopin's "Funeral March" in reverse to symbolize, as Will Halloway puts it, the rider's march "away from the grave." Several characters struggle with their desire to ride the carousel, and while Will and Jim want to ride to instantly become men and escape the confines of childhood, both Charles and Miss Foley, who are in their fifties, long to recapture their lost youth. The carousel, and to a greater extent the entire carnival, relies on carnival goers *choosing* to ride, and it is in this way that Bradbury ultimately asserts that good and evil are a matter of choice rather than an inherent quality. Will, Jim, and Charles fight their desire to ride the carousel for much of the novel, and this implies that the choice between good and evil is a constant battle fraught with temptation that must be continually negotiated.



CLOCKS

There are several references to clocks within *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and while they are certainly associated with keeping time, Bradbury also uses clocks to symbolize life and mortality. When Charles Halloway describes his wife, Mrs. Halloway, he calls her a "strange wonderful clock" who "nests in Time." Because Charles's wife has given birth to their son, Will, she has made the "flesh that holds fast and binds eternity," and as such, she is immortal. On the other hand, after the evil Mr. Dark dispatches the Dust Witch to kill Charles by inducing a fatal heart attack, Mr. Dark tells her to "stop his clock." Whereas Charles's wife's clock ensures her immortality, Charles's own clock is the source of his own vulnerability and mortality.

Additionally, ticking clocks are also symbolic of the choice between good and evil in Bradbury's novel. Charles explains to Will and Jim that each passing second is another opportunity to deny evil and embrace good. "That's what the clock ticks," Charles says, "that's what it says in the ticks." Indeed, Bradbury frequently mentions ticking clocks at key times during the novel. For example, as Will sneaks out late at night to follow Jim to Miss Foley's house to engage Mr. Cooger (who is posing as Miss Foley's twelve-year-old nephew, Robert), Jim faintly hears the town clock strike ten. Similarly, at the end of the novel, when Will, Jim, and Charles must resist the evil **carousel** one last time, the same clock can be heard striking midnight. Just as Charles explains, each individual strike of the clock represents another chance to reject the evil of Cooger and Dark's carnival and instead choose good. Lastly, when Charles researches the carnival and tries to find a way to defeat its evil, he arranges the books he references in the shape of a clockface. Like the individual ticks of the clock, each book represents Charles's own attempts to denounce evil and commit himself—and by



SYMBOLS

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



THE CAROUSEL

Mr. Cooger and Mr. Dark's carousel symbolizes temptation within Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. The carousel is one of the attractions of Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show, and while the carnival itself represents evil within Bradbury's novel, the carousel is the means through which Mr. Dark lures and captures the souls that fuel his wicked carnival. The carousel is infused with the supernatural, and it has the power to instantly transform a rider's age in keeping with how many turns it makes either forward or backward. For instance, Mr. Cooger

extension, Will and Jim as well—to good.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* published in 1962.

Prologue Quotes

☞ And that was the October week when they grew up overnight, and were never so young anymore...

Related Characters: Jim Nightshade, Will Halloway

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs at the very beginning of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* as Will and Jim are first introduced. The boys are described as young, both on the cusp of fourteen, and this quote sets the stage for their fall from innocence. Bradbury's novel is largely a coming-of-stage story, or "Bildungsroman," and it follows Will and Jim as they transition from childhood to adulthood, placing special emphasis on their personal and moral growth. Instead of a slow and gradual change, Bradbury implies that Will and Jim's evolution is more sudden and occurs "overnight." In this way, Bradbury suggests that age is more than the accumulation of time; it is also the building of experience, which often does not adhere to clocks and calendars.

The month of October carries connotations of Halloween and evil, and Bradbury indeed makes this connection. He associates autumn months with darkness and turmoil and summer months with light and goodness, and when Cooger and Dark's carnival arrives they are described as "autumn people," a direct reference to their malevolence. It is precisely this exposure to wickedness that fast-forwards Will and Jim's development and ultimately forces them to choose between good and evil, but Bradbury's use of ellipses implies that there is something more as well. By the end of the novel, Will and Jim both ride Cooger and Dark's carousel. They are only aboard for moment—about half a turn—but by the time they step off, they have technically aged a full six months, and are literally "never so young anymore."

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Dad winked at Will. Will winked back. They stood now, a boy with corn-colored hair and a man with moon-white hair, a boy with a summer-apple, a man with a winter-apple face. Dad, Dad, thought Will, why, why, he looks...like *me* in a smashed mirror!

Related Characters: Charles Halloway, Will Halloway

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Bradbury introduces Will's father, Charles Halloway. Immediately, Bradbury implies that Will and Charles have an easy and playful relationship. As Will and Charles "wink" at each other, it reflects the affection that they have for one another and suggests that they are part of a long-running inside joke or secret. While Will and Charles indeed have a loving relationship, it is tainted by Charles's old age, and this is likewise reflected in this quote. Will's "corn-colored hair" is evidence of his youth, while Charles's "moon-white hair" firmly establishes him as an old man who has gone completely gray. Again, Bradbury employs seasons of the year to describe people, and in this case, Will's "summer-apple" face describes a fresh and young boy, whereas Charles's "winter-apple face" carries connotations of old age and even death.

Will's realization that Charles looks like him in a "smashed mirror" does more than merely imply a familial resemblance—it also foretells Charles's experience in Cooger and Dark's Mirror Maze. As Will looks at Charles, he sees himself reflected as an old man, and this is exactly what Charles sees as he steps inside the maze.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ And Will? Why he's the last peach, high on a summer tree. Some boys walk by and you cry, seeing them. They feel good, they look good, they are good. Oh, they're not above peeing off a bridge, or stealing an occasional dime-store pencil sharpener; it's not that. It's just, you know, seeing them pass, that's how they'll be all their life; they'll get hit, hurt, cut, bruised, and always wonder why, why does it happen? How can it happen to *them*?

Related Characters: Charles Halloway, Will Halloway

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 16-7

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Bradbury more thoroughly introduces Will, and it establishes Will as the personification of an effortless kind of health and goodness. Bradbury creates a dichotomy between good and evil within the novel, and he again associates goodness and purity with the summer season. Will is the “last peach, high on a summer tree,” which implies he is not only young and sweet, but better than the other peaches as well. He resides on the very top of the tree and looks down over everyone else. According to Charles, everything about Will is “good,” to the point that it even brings tears to his eyes. This quote underscores Will’s innocence and vulnerability, which is reflected in his tendency to “get hit, hurt, cut, bruised, and always wonder why, why does it happen?” Will expects the world to be as good and kind as he is, but of course, he slowly learns otherwise.

This quote also reflects Bradbury’s central argument that good and evil are ultimately choices that must be continually made. Despite Will’s inherent goodness, he is still faced with the opportunity to be bad, or evil, and he does occasionally behave in ways that are not so good. While Will doesn’t exactly “pee off a bridge” or commit petty theft, he does disobey his parents and sneak out of the house late at night, and he certainly struggles with the temptation of the carousel. In this way, Will’s innate goodness doesn’t guarantee good behavior—it simply makes him more likely to make the right, or good, decision.

☛ But Jim, now, he sees it happen, he watches for it happening, he sees it start, and he sees it finish, he licks the wounds he expected, and never asks why; he *knows*. He *always* knew. Someone knew before him, a long time ago, someone who had wolves for pets and lions for night conversants. Hell, Jim doesn’t know with his mind. But his body knows. And while Will’s putting a bandage on his latest scratch, Jim’s ducking, weaving, bouncing away from the knockout blow which must inevitably come.

Related Characters: Will Halloway, Charles Halloway, Jim Nightshade

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, also seen through Charles’s thoughts, Bradbury more fully explains Jim and establishes Jim as Will’s foil. Will expects the world to be kind and good, and he is surprised when it isn’t, but Jim *expects* pain. Furthermore, Jim doesn’t run from this pain; instead, “he sees it start, and he sees it finish,” which implies that he meets it head-on, ready to fight. According to Charles, Jim “*knows*” about the bad in the world; in fact, he has “*always*” known, and this has the effect of making Jim appear older than his thirteen years. Jim’s knowledge is rooted in the painful and tragic experiences of his life—both his siblings and his father died early in his childhood—but his knowledge of life’s pain goes much deeper than this. His knowledge is old, from “a long time ago,” and Bradbury’s mention of wolves and lions as “night conversants” suggests that Jim’s knowledge is instinctual, much like a wild animal. In this vein, Bradbury again argues that age is more than years lived, but also constitutes experience both lived and learned.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☛☛ For, he thought, it’s a special hour. Women never wake then, do they? They sleep the sleep of babes and children. But men in middle age? They know that hour well. Oh God, midnight’s not bad, you wake and go back to sleep, one or two’s not bad, you toss but sleep again. Five or six in the morning, there’s hope, for dawn’s just under the horizon. But three, now, Christ, three A.M.! Doctors say the body’s at low tide then. The soul is out. The blood moves slow. You’re the nearest to dead you’ll ever be save dying. Sleep is a patch of death, but three in the morn, full wide-eyed staring, is living death!

Related Characters: Will’s Mother / Mrs. Halloway, Charles Halloway

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 55-6

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Cooger and Dark’s carnival arrives in Green Town at three o’clock in the morning. Charles considers this time “a special hour” because it is often the time of night when his deep unhappiness comes to a head. Charles resents his advancing age, which inevitably brings him closer to death with each passing year. While Charles lies awake obsessing over his mortality, his wife sleeps “the sleep of babes and children,” safe and secure in her youth (at least in his perception). Charles claims that sleeplessness

during this time is common among older men, or those in “middle age,” so much so that they “know that hour well.” Charles’s mortality is more apparent at three a.m. when his body is “at low tide” and his “soul is out,” and he even goes so far as to call it a “living death.” To Charles, death represents the ultimate fear, and sleep, when it does come, is his only reprieve.

This quote also reflects the evil intentions of the carnival, and Bradbury’s reference to “three in the morn” carries additional connotations of death and mourning. Mr. Dark’s carnival is fueled by the souls he collects, so it makes sense that he would arrive at a time when “the soul is out.” Mr. Dark feeds on the mourning and unhappiness of three a.m., and the souls he does collect very much represent a “living death” from which there is no escape. Once a soul is collected, they are held in bondage and forced to do Mr. Dark’s bidding.

●● His wife smiled in her sleep.

Why?

She’s immortal. She has a son.

Your son, too!

But what father ever really believes it? He carries no burden, he feels no pain. What man, like woman, lies down in darkness and gets up with child? The gentle, smiling ones own the good secret. Oh, what strange wonderful clocks women are. They nest in Time. They make the flesh that holds fast and binds eternity. They live inside the gift, know power, accept, and need not mention it. Why speak of Time when you *are* Time, and shape the universal moments, as they pass, into warmth and action? How men envy and often hate these warm clocks, these wives, who they know will live forever.

Related Characters: Will Halloway, Will’s Mother / Mrs. Halloway, Charles Halloway

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Charles continues to explain his wife’s contented sleep, and this quote also establishes Bradbury’s connection between clocks and life and mortality. Charles’s own clock, his aging heart, is the source of his vulnerability and mortality, but his wife’s clock is the source of her strength

and immortality. Charles claims that his wife is immortal because she has given birth to Will, and while Will is his son too, it is not exactly the same thing for fathers. Charles considers his wife the owner of “the good secret,” and this makes her appear inherently good, much like Will. As the creator of “the flesh that holds fast and binds eternity,” a part of her will never die, and she will live on through the generations.

In this way, Charles’s wife is “Time,” and therefore does not lie awake at night lamenting the limited duration of her life. This immortality is the source of her “power,” and while Charles struggles to accept his own age and mortality, she “need not mention it.” The resulting “envy and often hate” that Charles feels toward her easy acceptance of life and mortality serves to compound his deep unhappiness. Furthermore, this quote has increased meaning when considered in context with Miss Foley. Miss Foley does not have children, and she resents her age and mortality just as Charles does. In this vein, Bradbury suggests that since she has not given birth, she is mortal and therefore more drawn to the carnival and the opportunity to live forever.

Chapter 22 Quotes

●● Will grabbed Jim’s shirt front, felt his heart bang under the chest bones. “Jim—”

“Let go.” Jim was terribly quiet. “If he knows you’re here, he won’t come out. Willy, if you don’t let go, I’ll remember when—”
“When *what!*”

“When I’m older, darn it, *older!*”

Related Characters: Jim Nightshade, Charles Halloway (speaker), Mr. Cooger / Robert / Mr. Electrico

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

Will has just followed Jim back to Miss Foley’s house, where Mr. Cooger is posing as Miss Foley’s twelve-year-old nephew, Robert. While both Will and Jim struggle with the trappings of childhood and long to be older, Jim’s desire is much stronger than Will’s, and this is evident in Jim’s behavior. Jim is hoping that Robert will take him back to the carousel so that he can ride it forward and instantly become a man. Will senses the danger involved and rushes to intervene, but Jim is determined, and this is clear as his

heart “bangs” in his chest.

As Will attempts to stop him, Jim threatens him with the strength and power that comes along with age, telling Will he will “remember when he’s older.” This quote makes plain Jim’s deep desire to escape childhood; he struggles with this desire and the temptation of the carousel right up until the end of the novel. However, this quote also underscores Will and Jim’s differences. Will values their friendship far too much to leave Jim behind and ride the carousel alone. Jim, on the other hand, is fine with sneaking off in the middle of the night and returning to Will a man. Jim doesn’t seem to consider the long-term effects of riding the carousel, and Will is forced to be the voice of reason.

Chapter 23 Quotes

☝ Will saw the evil boy, a year older still, glide around into the night. Five or six more times around and he’d be bigger than the two of them!

“Jim, he’ll kill us!”

“Not me, no!”

Will felt a sting of electricity. He yelled, pulled back, hit the switch handle. The control box spat. Lightning jumped to the sky, Jim and Will, flung by the blast, lay watching the merry-go-round run wild.

Related Characters: Jim Nightshade, Will Halloway (speaker), Mr. Cooger / Robert / Mr. Electrico

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Jim and Will chase Robert back to the carousel after he frames them for stealing Miss Foley’s jewelry. By this point, Will and Jim are aware of the carnival’s malicious intent, and this is reflected in Bradbury’s use of the word “evil” to describe Robert. As Robert rides the carousel forward, aging with each turn, the threat of evil grows as well. Robert clearly means them harm—he has just framed them, after all—and as he grows, Will begins to worry that Robert will murder them. Will’s concern for his own safety as well as Jim’s is a product of his inherent goodness and the love he feels for Jim, but Jim doesn’t reciprocate. Jim is aware that Robert may potentially kill Will, but he knows that he will be spared and allowed to ride the carousel, as is clear when Jim responds:

“Not me, no!” In this way, Jim knows he will have to sacrifice Will to realize his own desire to ride the carousel and become older, and he seems strangely comfortable with this.

Will feels a “sting of electricity” because he is shocked and hurt by Jim’s response, and this electricity is further reflected in the electricity that leaps forth from the control box.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☝ Miss Foley had first noticed, some years ago, that her house was crowded with bright shadows of herself. Best, then, to ignore the cold sheets of December ice in the hall, above the bureaus, in the bath. Best skate the thin ice, lightly. Paused, the weight of your attention might crack the shell. Plunged through the crust, you might drown in depths so cold, so remote, that all the Past lay carved in tombstone marbles there. Ice water would syringe your veins. Transfixed at the mirror still, you would stand forever, unable to lift your gaze from the proofs of Time.

Related Characters: Miss Foley / Aunt Willa

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Foley is struggling, much like Charles, with the reality of her advancing age. Bradbury implies that Miss Foley has resented her age for quite some time. At fifty years old, her discontent began “some years ago,” and the struggle is wearing her down. Because of this resentment, Miss Foley avoids mirrors, but they are inescapable and “crowd” her house. Bradbury’s conflicting description of Miss Foley’s reflection as “bright shadows of herself” implies that she has become someone she doesn’t quite recognize, but she is confronted with this stranger each time she crosses a mirror. Bradbury again draws a parallel between winter and death and old age, and the mirrors that capture Miss Foley’s aging reflection are likened to “cold sheets of December ice.” The thinness of the ice means that Miss Foley must navigate mirrors carefully, and if she stares too long, she is reminded of the inevitable death that old age implies.

While this quote highlights Miss Foley’s desire for youth, it also explains why she reacts so badly when she becomes trapped in the Mirror Maze. Miss Foley’s aversion to mirrors and the resentment she has for her aging reflection makes her shock at seeing herself reflected as a young girl

even more powerful. In the maze, Miss Foley does not see the familiar “proofs of Time” that populate her mirrors at home; this only increases her desire to be young.

Chapter 26 Quotes

🗨️ “Oh, Jim, Jim, you *do* see, don’t you? Everything in its time, like the preacher said only last month, everything one by one, not two by two, will you remember?”

Related Characters: Will Halloway (speaker), Jim Nightshade

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Will and Jim leave the carnival with the police. Will is convinced that Mr. Dark and Mr. Cooger are dangerous monsters, but Jim still wants to ride the carousel. Here, Will pleads with Jim to realize what has become so obvious to him—that the carousel is not a quick fix for their desire to be older. Will is desperate for Jim to understand, and this is apparent in the emphasis placed on the word “*do*.” Jim can’t simply climb on the carousel and become a man and skip the time and experience that those lost years entail.

Furthermore, Will’s reference to the preacher’s sermon reflects his own purity and goodness, suggesting that Will is a good Christian. Of course, Will implies that Jim was present for the sermon as well, but he clearly wasn’t listening, and the fact that he needs reminding is evidence of Jim’s inner struggles with good and evil. Will’s plea for Jim to take his time and age slowly as intended reflects Bradbury’s argument that time and age shouldn’t be rushed. While the tragic circumstances of Jim’s life make him appear much older than he is, this is not a substitute for the experiences and lessons he would skip by riding the carousel. In this way, Bradbury argues the value of embracing the slow, cumulative nature of age and experience, which Jim will miss out on if he attempts to take his childhood “two by two.”

Chapter 28 Quotes

🗨️ “[...] Now, look, since when did you think being good meant being happy?”

“Since always.”

“Since now learn otherwise. Sometimes the man who looks happiest in town, with the biggest smile, is the one carrying the biggest load of sin. There are smiles and smiles; learn to tell the dark variety from the light. The seal-barker, the laugh-shouter, half the time he’s covering up. He’s had his fun and he’s guilty. And men *do* love sin, Will, oh how they love it, never doubt, in all shapes, sizes, colors, and smells. [...]”

Related Characters: Will Halloway, Charles Halloway (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 124-5

Explanation and Analysis

Charles and Will are sitting on their front porch having a father and son chat, and Will is learning that happy and good are not synonymous terms. Charles’s explanation of the differences between good and happy underscore the danger Will faces in the form of the carnival. When Will first meets Mr. Dark, he wears a smile and offers free rides on his carousel, but just as Charles warns, Mr. Dark carries “the biggest load of sin.” Of course, Mr. Dark means to cause Will harm, and Will must learn to discern his “dark” smile from other harmless “light” smiles he encounters. Charles associates the biggest smiles with the most sin and claims the “seal-barker” and “laugh-shouter” are the guiltiest. In this way, not only are good and happy not synonymous, but they are often polar opposites.

Charles’s fatherly talk also highlights the power of temptation and the ease with which many people sin. Temptation is everywhere, Charles warns, and “men *do* love sin.” Being good often involves difficult decisions and the sacrifice of happiness, but most of all, this quote implies that being good is a choice that must be continually made. As Will struggles with his own temptation to ride the carousel, he is attracted by the very same sin his father warns him about. To ride the carousel is to embrace the sin of Mr. Dark, and Will must actively choose good, even if that means he be unhappy for a while.

“Oh, it would be lovely if you could just *be* fine, *act* fine, not think of it all the time. But it’s hard, right? With the last piece of lemon cake waiting in the icebox, middle of the night, not yours, but you lie awake in a hot sweat for it, eh? Do I need tell you? Or, a hot spring day, noon, and there you are chained to your school desk and away off there goes the river, cool and fresh over the rock-fall. Boys can hear clear water like that miles away. So, minute by minutes, hour by hour, a lifetime, it never ends, never stops, you got the choice this second, now this next, and the next after that, be good, be bad, that’s what the clock ticks, that’s what it says in the ticks.”

Related Characters: Charles Halloway (speaker), Will Halloway

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Charles continues his fatherly talk with Will, and it focuses on temptation and how difficult being good can be, but it also establishes Charles’s belief that each “tick” of the clock represents another opportunity to embrace good and reject evil. Bradbury describes Will as an exceedingly good person, but this does not mean that he doesn’t struggle to do the right thing, and this is reflected in Charles’s comment. Will can’t “just *be* fine, *act* fine,” meaning he can’t just be good without constantly thinking about it. The constant nature of this decision is reflected in the tempting examples Charles provides. He employs visions of forbidden cake and a hunger that reduces Will to “a hot sweat,” but to eat the cake, which doesn’t belong to him, is wrong, and Will must make the conscious choice to do the right thing.

Similarly, Will must also make the conscious choice not to ride the carousel and surrender to the evil of Mr. Dark, even though he may be tempted to do so by the promise of instant adulthood. Indeed, as Will tries to avoid the carousel, he is surrounded by the ticking clocks of city hall and numerous local churches, and with each second, Will runs the risk of succumbing to the temptation of the carnival. In this way, Bradbury maintains that everybody, even a good and pure soul like Will, has the potential for evil.

Chapter 38 Quotes

“For some, autumn comes early, stays late through life where October follows September and November touches October and then instead of December and Christ’s birth, there is no Bethlehem Star, no rejoicing, but September comes again and old October and so on down the years, with no winter, spring, or revivifying summer. For these beings, fall is the ever normal season, the only weather, there be no choice beyond. Where do they come from? The dust. Where do they go? The grave. Does blood stir their veins? No: the night wind. What ticks in their head? The worm. What speaks from their mouth? The toad. What sees from their eye? The snake. What hears with their ear? The abyss between the stars. They sift the human storm for souls, eat flesh of reason, fill tombs with sinners. They frenzy forth. In gusts they beetle-scurry, creep, thread, filter, motion, make all moons sullen, and surely cloud all clear-run waters. The spider-web hears them, trembles—breaks. Such are the autumn people. Beware of them.”

Related Characters: Charles Halloway (speaker), Jim Nightshade, Will Halloway

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Charles tells Will and Jim an old religious story he heard as a child about the evil “autumn people,” which he uses to describe the evil of the carnival. This quote also reflects Bradbury’s association between autumn months and evil, and it explains precisely why Cooger and Dark’s carnival arrives so late in the year. For Cooger and Dark, it is always fall, and they embody the death and decay that autumn months imply. The evil of Cooger and Dark is incompatible with the goodness and piety associated with December and Christmas, and they also cannot survive in the purity of spring and the life associated with the lush green of summer.

Cooger and Dark thrive in the sinister time of Halloween, and their evil is further reflected in Charles’s mention of snakes, worms, and toads. There is nothing warm about them, and they “sift the human storm for souls” and fill their carnival with “sinners.” Charles’s warning to Will and Jim to “beware” the people of autumn implies that the boys have every right to be afraid, and this fear pervades most of the novel. Bradbury ultimately argues, however, that this fear must be faced and can’t be avoided, and it isn’t until they each face this fear that the evil of the carnival is defeated.

☛ “Then—” Will swallowed— “does that make us...*summer* people?”

“Not quite.” Charles Halloway shook his head. “Oh, you’re nearer summer than me. If I was ever a rare fine summer person, that’s long ago. Most of us are half-and-half. The August noon in us works to stave off the November chills. We survive by what little Fourth of July wits we’ve stashed away. But there are times when we’re all autumn people.”

Related Characters: Charles Halloway, Will Halloway (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 176-7

Explanation and Analysis

This quote also occurs as Charles describes the carnival members as “autumn people,” and it again employs Bradbury’s association between summer, morality, and youth. When Charles claims that Will is closer to summer than he is, this is another reference to Charles’s old age, but it is also a reflection of Will’s inherent goodness and morality. For Charles, summer was “long ago,” in that his own childhood was many years ago, but he also claims that summer people are “rare” and “fine,” which implies that few are as good as Will. Charles tells his son that most people are “half-and-half,” meaning they are equally good and bad, and they require the good, or the “August noon,” to counter their evil side, or “November chills.” They manage to remain moral and reject evil only because they “stash away” the purity implied by the height of summer, or the “Fourth of July.”

Even with the protection of this summer “stash,” however, reverting to evil and becoming an autumn person is still a possibility. In this way, Bradbury again argues that everybody, even Will, has the potential to stray from good and become evil. Will’s moral compass is not a guarantee that he will always be good, and Cooger and Dark don’t have a monopoly on sin and evil. Charles’s words imply that there is evil and darkness beyond the carnival, and it lives inside everyone.

Chapter 39 Quotes

☛ “Oh gosh,” said Will. “It’s hopeless!”

“No. The very fact we’re here worrying about the difference between summer and autumn, makes me sure there’s a way out. You don’t have to *stay* foolish and you don’t *have* to be wrong, evil, sinful, whatever you want to call it. There’s more than three or four choices. *They*, that Dark fellow and his friends don’t hold all the cards, I could tell that today, at the cigar store. I’m afraid of him but, I could see, he was afraid of me. So there’s fear on both sides. Now *how* can we use it to advantage?”

Related Characters: Charles Halloway, Will Halloway (speaker), Mr. Dark / The Illustrated Man / Jed

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 178-9

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Will begins to understand his own potential for evil and the temptation that the carnival represents. Will thinks that it is impossible to resist the evil that is Cooger and Dark’s carnival, but Charles knows differently. Just because Will has the potential to be both good and bad does not mean that he must resign himself to evil, as is in keeping with Bradbury’s argument that good and evil are ultimately choices that must be made. Charles claims that Will does not have to be bad or choose evil, but also maintains that this choice may not always be clear—or easy.

When Charles says that Mr. Dark doesn’t “hold all the cards,” this is a direct reference to the fear that he induces. The carnival relies on the town’s fears to control and terrorize them, but earlier that day when Charles is faced with this fear in the form of the Dust Witch, he is able, for the time being, to stand up to his fear and defeat her. While Charles is obviously afraid, he refuses to give into his fear. In doing so, he denies Mr. Dark’s power as well, and it is in this way that he uses fear to his “advantage.”

Chapter 40 Quotes

☞ “Is...is it...Death?”

“The carnival?” The old man lit his pipe, blew smoke, seriously studied the patterns. “No. But I think it uses Death as a threat. Death doesn’t exist. It never did, it never will. But we’ve drawn so many pictures of it, so many years, trying to pin it down, comprehend it, we’ve got to thinking of it as an entity, strangely alive and greedy. All it is, however, is a stopped watch, a loss, an end, a darkness. Nothing. And the carnival wisely knows we’re more afraid of Nothing than we are of Something. You can fight Something. But...Nothing? Where do you hit it? Has it a heart, soul, butt-behind, brain? No, no. So the carnival just shakes a great croupier’s cupful of Nothing at us, and reaps us as we tumble back head-over-heels in fright.”

Related Characters: Charles Halloway, Will Halloway (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 186-7

Explanation and Analysis

This quote also occurs as Charles explains the carnival to Will, and Will associates the evil of Mr. Dark with death. According to Charles, the carnival does not represent death, but the *fear* of death, and more precisely, the fear of the unknown. Death is the ultimate unknown, and Mr. Dark taps into this fear to lure unsuspecting souls to the carousel. Charles’s words reflect a natural obsession with death—since so little is known about it, death has become a popular topic of speculation—but Charles considers death a void, or a “stopped watch.” This analogy again reflects Bradbury’s connection between clocks and life and mortality, but it also establishes that Charles is more frightened by the “Nothing” of this void than he is of anything else.

Charles’s fear of death is clear when he enters the carnival’s Mirror Maze and sees himself reflected as an impossibly old man moving closer and closer to the grave. Of course, Charles overcomes this fear and defeats Mr. Dark, but the carnival’s intention is to scare Charles right onto the carousel, effectively destroying his soul in the process. Charles refers to this fear as a “great croupier’s cupful of Nothing” that the carnival “shakes” at them. A “croupier,” or card dealer, is generally in charge of collecting and paying out bets, but in this case the dealer’s cup is empty, which represents the void that is death. To calm this fear, the

carnival offers the carousel and instant youth, and then “reaps” payment in the form of souls.

☞ “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! Or if they turned *me* into a boy of ten this instant, my brain would still be fifty and that boy would act funnier and older and weirder than any boy ever. Then, too, time’s out of joint another way.”

Related Characters: Charles Halloway (speaker), Jim Nightshade

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

Here Charles explains to Jim the main problem with riding Cooger and Dark’s carousel. Jim longs to be a man and struggles with the confines of his youth. At thirteen, he is still subject to the rules of his mother, and the carousel offers him an instant fix. However, Charles warns Jim that if he is “a miserable sinner” in “one shape,” he will be miserable in a different one as well, which is to say that Jim will be unhappy no matter what age he is. Jim thinks he is unhappy because he lacks the freedom of adulthood, and while the carousel can give him the *appearance* of age, it cannot give him the experiences and wisdom that age implies.

Likewise, the carousel can give Charles the appearance of youth, but it can’t take away the knowledge and wisdom he already has. As Charles says, the carousel “doesn’t change the brain,” and when life experiences are at odds with one’s age, “time is out of joint.” With this quote, Bradbury highlights the dangers of wishing away time or looking back mournfully on one’s youth, and instead argues the importance of accepting age and the gradual accumulation of experience.

☛☛ “So, what happens? You get your reward: madness. Change of body, change of personal environment, for one thing. Guilt, for another, guilt at leaving your wife, husband, friends to die the way all men die—Lord, that alone would give a man fits. So more fear, more agony for the carnival to breakfast on. So with the green vapors coming off your stricken conscience you say you want to go back the way you were! The carnival nods and listens. Yes, they promise, if you behave as they say, in a short while they’ll give you back your twoscore and ten or whatever. On the promise alone of being returned to normal old age, that train travels with the world, its side show populated with madmen waiting to be released from bondage, meantime servicing the carnival, giving it coke for its ovens.”

Related Characters: Charles Halloway (speaker), Jim Nightshade

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is Charles’s explanation to Jim of what will happen if he rides Cooger and Dark’s carousel. Jim expects the carousel to make him instantly older and happier. Of course, this isn’t exactly how it goes, and Charles’s explanation lays out the bare truth. Instead of getting what he wants, Jim will only get “madness.” If Jim rides the carousel, he will pay with his soul and become one of Mr. Dark’s freaks, and he will never see his mother or Will again. Jim obviously loves them, and the “agony” he will feel without them will only serve as fuel for the carnival and make their evil stronger.

The image of the “green vapors” that will “come off [Jim’s] stricken conscience” if he chooses to ride the carousel is a reference to the evil and sin that he must embrace in the process. To choose the carousel is to choose evil, and there is no easy way back. Mr. Dark can’t be trusted to give Jim back his youth after he realizes it is a mistake, especially when Mr. Dark needs Jim’s tortured soul as “coke for his ovens.” Thus, Jim will be trapped in “bondage,” a slave to Mr. Dark’s evil. This quote marks a critical moment in the development of Jim’s character because it reveals to him the true cost of riding the carousel, and when Jim *does* step onto the carousel at the end of the novel, he does so with full knowledge of the consequences.

Chapter 49 Quotes

☛☛ And then, at last, he gave the maze, the mirrors, and all Time ahead, Beyond, Around, Above, Behind, Beneath or squandered inside himself, the only answer possible.

He opened his mouth very wide, and let the loudest sound of all free.

The Witch, if she were alive, would have known that sound, and died again.

Related Characters: The Dust Witch, Charles Halloway

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Charles is trapped in Cooger and Dark’s Mirror Maze and he shatters the mirrors with a deafening scream. This passage is significant because it represents Charles’s transition from an old, miserable man to the happy man that runs alongside his son at the end of the novel. Charles’s scream is his “answer,” not only in response to the maze and the evil that it represents, but in response to the old man reflected in the mirrors. Charles resents his old age, and he fears the inevitable death that his age implies, but he must accept his age and mortality if he is to escape the maze, rescue Jim, and destroy the evil of the carnival. As Charles screams, he accepts his aging reflection and everything it entails. He accepts whatever limited “Time” he may have left and accepts the fact that much of his life is likely already gone. He also accepts the time that he has “squandered,” or wasted, lamenting a youth that he can’t get back.

If Charles surrenders to his fear and resentment of his age, both Will and Jim will become Mr. Dark’s freaks, but Charles will also sacrifice his own happiness in the process. When Charles screams his acceptance, he overcomes the prime source of unhappiness in his life. Free of his resentment and fear, Charles is now able to live happily, and this happiness would surely kill the Witch all over again, “if she were alive.”

Chapter 52 Quotes

☛☛ He gathered the boy somewhat closer and thought, Evil has only the power that we give it. I give you nothing. I take back. Starve. Starve. Starve.

Related Characters: Mr. Dark / The Illustrated Man / Jed, Charles Halloway

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Charles destroys Mr. Dark, who is posing as a young boy named Jed. Charles effectively kills Mr. Dark not by violence, which would only ensure the continuation of evil in another form, but by infecting Mr. Dark with love. Not only does this quote underscore Bradbury's primary argument of the power of love in the face of evil, but it also reflects his claim that fear and evil only have the power that one grants them. The carnival thrives on the fear that its evil produces, and Mr. Dark uses this fear as a source of power to collect souls to fuel his carnival, but when Charles holds Jed close and "starves" him of this power, he refuses to give into the fear that he obviously feels. In this way, Charles refuses to believe in Mr. Dark's evil and the fear of death that he represents, and once Charles accepts his advancing age and his own mortality, he is finally able to overcome his fears and destroy the carnival. Mr. Dark and the carnival serve as an allegory for fear of the unknown, and Bradbury implies that this fear can only be overcome by directly facing it and acknowledging that certain things cannot be explained or understood.

Chapter 54 Quotes

☝☝ "Will!" His father savagely jabbed a finger at him and at Jim. "Damn it, Willy, all this, all these, Mr. Dark and his sort, they *like* crying, my God, they *love* tears! Jesus God, the more you bawl, the more they drink the salt off your chin. Wail and they suck your breath like cats. Get up! Get off your knees, damn it! Jump around! Whoop and holler! You hear! Shout, Will, sing, but most of all laugh, you got that, laugh!"

Related Characters: Charles Halloway (speaker), Mr. Dark / The Illustrated Man / Jed, Jim Nightshade, Will Halloway

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

Charles has just defeated Mr. Dark and Will has pulled Jim from the carousel, but Will fears that Jim cannot be saved, and he breaks down in tears. Charles orders Will to stop crying and tells him instead to "laugh." This quote reflects Bradbury's argument for the power of laughter and

happiness in the face of the evil. The carnival thrives on pain and sadness. According to Charles, the carnival "loves tears," and Will isn't doing Jim any favors by crying. It isn't Jim's body that is dying from riding the evil carousel, it is his soul, and he requires happiness and laughter to be revived. Because of this, Charles orders Will to "whoop and holler," and dance and sing, anything to counter the evil of the carnival. Charles and Will's happiness and laughter does indeed prove to be Jim's saving grace, and he responds to their efforts with laughter and happiness of his own, which again implies that even the darkest evil is no match for pure, unbridled happiness.

☝☝ "Dad, will they ever come back?"

"No. And yes." Dad tucked away his harmonica. "No, not them. But yes, other people like them. Not in a carnival. God knows what shape they'll come in next. But sunrise, noon, or at latest, sunset tomorrow they'll show. They're on the road."

"Oh, no," said Will.

"Oh, yes," said Dad. "We got to watch out the rest of our lives. The fight's just begun."

They moved around the carousel slowly.

"What will they look like? How will we know them?"

"Why," said Dad, quietly, "maybe they're already here."

Both boys looked around swiftly.

But there was only the meadow, the machine, and themselves.

Related Characters: Will Halloway, Charles Halloway (speaker), Jim Nightshade

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

Charles has just saved Jim from the carousel and destroyed Mr. Dark. This quote is significant because it implies that just because the evil of the carnival has been neutralized, they are not necessarily out of danger. This is in keeping with Bradbury's argument that everyone has the potential for evil. While Charles admits that the carnival won't be back, there is still the threat of evil—how exactly this evil will present itself is a mystery, but it will always surface one way or another. This is evident in Charles's warning that the "fight has just begun," and Bradbury reinforces this fact by

again mentioning the carousel. The carousel represents temptation, and wherever there is temptation, there is the potential for evil. When Charles claims that this new threat of evil may already be present, and Will and Jim look around to the empty meadow, it implies that *they* are the new threat of evil. While Will is an exceedingly good person who usually tries to do the right thing, even he is not immune to the potential of evil, and he too must spend the rest of his life actively choosing to do the right thing. Bradbury ultimately argues that good and evil are not inherent qualities, but instead rely on moment-to-moment decisions.

“Maybe this isn’t necessary,” said Charles Halloway.
 “Maybe it wouldn’t run anyway, without the freaks to give it power. But—” He hit the box a last time and threw down the wrench.

“It’s late. Must be midnight straight up.”

Obediently, the City Hall clock, the Baptist church clock, the Methodist, the Episcopalian, the Catholic church, all the clocks, struck twelve. The wind was seeded with Time.

Related Characters: Charles Halloway (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Charles defeats the evil of the carnival and destroys the carousel with a wrench. Even though Charles isn’t sure that the carousel will run without the carnival, it still tempts his desire to be young, and likewise tempts Will and Jim’s desires to be older, and therefore it must be destroyed. As long as the carousel is operational, there is a chance that any of them—Will, Jim, or Charles—will opt for the instant gratification that the carousel offers. This is further reflected in the “obedient” town clocks that loudly strike midnight. Just as Charles tells Will and Jim earlier in the text, each tick of the clock

represents another chance to reject evil and embrace good, and it is in this way that the wind is “seeded with Time.” As Charles dismantles the carousel and hears the clocks chime, it represents his own choice to do what he knows is right. Of course, the carousel represents only a single temptation, and the characters will be forced to navigate many more in the future.

“The father hesitated only a moment. He felt the vague pain in his chest. If I run, he thought, what will happen? Is Death important? No. Everything that happens before Death is what counts. And we’ve done fine tonight. Even Death can’t spoil it. So, there went the boys...and why not...*follow?*”

Related Characters: Jim Nightshade, Will Halloway, Charles Halloway

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 262

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs at the very end of the novel, and it reflects Charles’s acceptance of his age and his transition into a happy man and father. Here, Charles watches as Will and Jim happily run away from the carnival grounds, and as he does throughout most of the novel, Charles wishes he could run with them. When Charles “hesitates” and notes the “vague pain his chest,” this represents Charles’s old age and his fear of death. However, Charles’s experience with the carnival has taught him a powerful lesson, and he refuses to let his fear of death continue to rob him of his happiness and freedom.

To Charles, letting his life pass him by without enjoying it is a sadness much deeper than death, and with this quote, he is finally able to let go of the power that his fear of death holds over him. Much like when Charles refuses to let his fear of Mr. Dark control him, he refuses to let his fear of death control him as well. Because of this he can run, secure in the realization that if he does die, he has at least lived and loved life to its fullest.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

It is late October, and even though everything smells of smoke and the sky is “orange and ash gray at twilight,” Halloween feels like a million years away. This year, however, Halloween is coming early—on October 24, just “three hours after midnight” to be exact. Jim Nightshade and Will Halloway will turn fourteen at the end of the month, and this new age nearly “trembles in their hands.” But this October, Will and Jim will “grow up overnight,” and they will never again be “so young” again.

There is an association within Bradbury’s novel between autumn months and evil, and the fact that the story takes place in October reflects the evil that is coming in the form of Cooger and Dark’s carnival. Halloween also lends a spooky connotation, along with Bradbury’s allusion to 3 a.m.—a time often known as the witching hour. When Will and Jim’s upcoming birthdays “tremble in their hands,” this reflects their desire to quickly grow up and escape the restrictions of childhood, and Bradbury’s reference to the boys growing up overnight foretells the short ride they both take on the carousel at the end of the novel—which instantly makes them six months older.



CHAPTER 1

Tom Fury, a traveling lightning-rod salesman, arrives in Green Town, Illinois, just before a brewing storm, that “like a great beast with terrible teeth cannot be denied.” He comes across Jim and Will carving wood whistles in their front yards (Will and Jim live next-door to one another on Oak Street). The boys’ parents aren’t home, and the two don’t have any money. “Boy,” says Mr. Fury to Will, “what’s your name.”

Tom Fury’s name harkens to violent storms, but it also predicts the danger of Mr. Dark and the carnival, who also “cannot be denied.” Here, Will and Jim appear very young and innocent (they rely on their parents and don’t have money of their own), and this youth makes them appear good by extension.



Will, whose hair is “as blond-white as milk thistle,” looks to Mr. Fury with eyes as “bright and clear as a drop of summer rain.” He immediately tells the man his name, but Jim is reluctant. As Jim considers a false name, he looks at the stranger. Jim’s eyes are “mint rock-crystal green” and his hair is “wild, thick, and the glossy color of waxed chestnuts.” “Jim Nightshade,” he finally tells the man.

Will and Jim are foils of one another. Will is described in terms of lightness and purity, whereas Jim is described in terms of darkness. In this way, Will is viewed as inherently good, and while Jim is not exactly bad or evil, he struggles more than Will does to steer clear of evil.



“That’s quite a name,” Mr. Fury says to Jim. Will explains that Jim’s name is appropriate because he was born just one minute after midnight on October 31. Will himself was born just one minute before midnight on October 30. “Halloween,” Jim says.

Jim’s last name and birthday reflect his darkness and struggle with evil (nightshade is a poisonous plant). Will, however, was born just one minute before Halloween, which reflects his own inherent goodness and suggests that he is too good to share a birthday with the evil connotation of Halloween.



Mr. Fury reaches into his large bag and hands Will and Jim an “iron contraption.” He tells the boys to take it for free. Without it, he says, one of their houses will be struck by lightning. The contraption is full of “little curlicues” and “doohingies,” and it is covered with etchings of strange languages and symbols. “That’s Egyptian,” says Jim pointing to an iron bug soldered onto the metal. “Scarab beetle,” he clarifies. Will looks to the strange salesman, confused. “Which house will it strike?” he asks.

“Some folks draw lightning,” Mr. Fury says as he goes to inspect the houses. Mr. Fury runs his hands along the posts of Will’s front porch, letting the home’s “bones speak to him.” He tells the boys that he has provided over one hundred thousand “God-fearing homes” with lightning rods. He next goes to Jim’s house. “This,” Mr. Fury says, “is the one. Jim Nightshade, this your place?” he asks. “Mine,” says Jim.

Mr. Fury tells Jim to hurry and hammer the lightning rod to the roof of his house. “Don’t wait,” Mr. Fury says. “Git, boy! Hammer it high or you’re dead come dawn!” Mr. Fury warns him that there is “bad” coming. “Feel it, way off now, but running fast,” he says, and then turns and walks away. As the strange man leaves, Will encourages Jim to place the rod. “No,” smirks Jim. “Why spoil the fun?” Will reminds Jim of Jim’s mother. “You want *her* burnt?” he asks. Jim admits that he doesn’t, and the two boys climb to the top of Jim’s roof.

CHAPTER 2

After nailing the lightning rod to the roof, Will and Jim make their weekly run to the library. As they run down the street, Jim stops. “What’s *that*?” he asks. “What, the wind?” Will questions. Jim thinks he hears music, he says. “Don’t hear no music,” Will responds as he takes off running toward the library.

In the real world, life is pretty boring for Will and Jim, but in the library, a “land bricked with paper and leather, anything might happen, always did.” Will looks, surprised, to an “old man” hard at work in the library. “That’s Charles William Halloway,” Will thinks, “not grandfather, not far-wandering, ancient uncle, as some might think, but...*my father*.” Charles is surprised too, to see Will, as he always is. “Is that you, Will?” he asks his son. Charles looks to Jim, the boy’s eyes dark and his skin pale. “You burn yourself at both ends, Jim?” Charles asks.

As Will and Jim do not initially know whose house will be struck by lightning, this establishes a fear of the unknown that pervades most of the novel. Additionally, the scarab beetle, often viewed as a symbol of transformation and immortality within Egyptian culture, foretells the transformative abilities of the carousel and Charles’s desire for immortality.



Mr. Fury’s “God-fearing” customers are presumably religious, which implies purity, goodness, and the rejection of evil. Here, lightning is a reference to the evil of the carnival, and since Jim struggles to reject evil throughout the novel, his house “draws lightning,” meaning he is more susceptible to sin than Will is.



Mr. Fury’s warning adds to the fear of the unknown and the sense of impending doom that permeates most of the novel, and he identifies Jim as the target of this doom. Jim’s comment underscores his taste for trouble, which he refers to as “fun.” Jim only agrees to stave off the “bad” that is coming because of his love for his mother, which is in keeping with Bradbury’s underlying argument of the power of love in the face of evil.



Will and Jim’s library run mirrors Charles’s own love of books and the local library, where he spends most of his time early in the novel. The music that Jim hears comes from the carnival’s calliope instrument, and the fact that he hears it hours before the carnival arrives is evidence of the carnival’s supernatural power.



Bradbury’s description of Charles as an “old man” emphasizes his advanced age and implies that he is too old to be Will’s father, which is the direct source of Charles’s unhappiness. Will’s description of Charles as a “grandfather” or “ancient uncle” also suggests that his father is too old. Jim’s dark eyes and pale skin are another outward manifestation of his struggle with his dark side.



“Heck,” replies Jim. Charles reminds Jim that there is no such place and hands the boy a book. “But hell’s right here under ‘A’ for Alighieri,” he says. “Allegory’s beyond me,” Jim responds as he thumbs through the book. Charles begins to show Jim the book’s illustrations—pictures of “souls sunk to their gills in slime,” and a person “upside down, wrongside out.” Jim is instantly intrigued and asks Charles if the book has any pictures of dinosaurs. Next aisle over, he tells Jim, stopping to wink at Will.

Will winks back. As he stares at Charles, Will thinks, “why, why, he looks...like me in a smashed mirror!” Will remembers back to all the nights he woke at two a.m. only to find his father gone and the lights burning in the library windows across town. Charles frequently returns to the library late at night, after his family falls asleep, to “read alone under the green jungle lamps.” “Will,” Charles says, interrupting his son’s thoughts. “What about you?”

“Huh?” responds Will, distractedly. “You need a white-hat or black-hat book?” Charles asks him. Will looks up at his father, confused. “Well, Jim,” Charles explains, “he wears the black ten-gallon hats and reads books to fit.” Jim’s middle name is Moriarty, and he reads books about Fu Manchu, Machiavelli, and Dr. Faustus. “That leaves the white-hat boys to you, Will,” Charles says. “Here’s Gandhi. Next door is St. Thomas. And on the next level, well...Buddha.”

Will selects a copy of *The Mysterious Island*, and Jim asks Charles what all this talk of hats is about. “Why—” Charles stammers, “it’s just, a long time ago, I had to decide, myself, which color I’d wear.” Jim asks Charles which hat he chose. “Since you need to ask, Jim, you make me wonder,” Charles replies.

Will and Jim quickly check out their books and run outside into the fall night. Jim looks to the sky and wonders where the storm is. He can’t wait to watch lightning “fizz down the drainpipes.” As the wind blows, Will tells Jim that the storm will come by morning. “Who says?” Jim asks. “The huckleberries all down my arms. They say,” Will responds.

Charles’s mention of Dante Alighieri is a reference to the epic poem [Inferno](#), which tells of Dante’s journey through hell. Jim’s response that allegory is “beyond” him is highly ironic, as Bradbury’s novel itself is largely allegorical. Jim’s interest in dinosaurs, a typical obsession of young boys, emphasizes his youth.



The “smashed mirror” foretells the evil of Cooger and Dark’s Mirror Maze, which magically makes Charles appear older than he really is. Charles’s late-night trips to the library are evidence of the deep unhappiness he feels at the beginning of the novel, which serves to make his transformation into a happy man all the more powerful.



While Will’s books imply piety and goodness, Jim’s books are much darker, and this again highlights Jim’s internal struggles. Fu Manchu and Machiavelli are both famous villains, and Jim’s middle name, Moriarty, is a reference to the evil professor in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories. Dr. Faustus tells of a man who makes a pact with the Devil, which foreshadows Mr. Dark and his carousel—if Jim rides the carousel, he essentially makes a pact with the evil Mr. Dark.



Charles’s statement that he had to “decide” which color hat he would wear underscores Bradbury’s central argument that good and evil is ultimately a choice that must be consciously made.



Will’s “huckleberries,” or goosebumps, reflect the mysterious fear that blankets Green Town, and his body responds appropriately. Jim’s excitement over the upcoming storm reflects his propensity for danger.



CHAPTER 3

As Charles watches Will and Jim run down the street, he fights the “sudden urge to run with them, make the pack.” Charles thinks about the “secret places” the boys run to, places that won’t be such a secret later in life, and somewhere deep inside him “a shadow turns mournfully over.” The boys are so different from each other, he thinks. Will runs for the sake of exercise, but Jim runs to see what’s ahead.

“That’s Jim,” Charles thinks, “all bramblehair and itchweed.” But Will, he thinks, Will is the “the last peach, high on a summer tree.” Boys like Will are good— “they feel good, they look good, they are good.” Boys like Will still get into trouble occasionally, but each time they are hurt in life they “always wonder why, why does it happen?” Jim, on the other hand, expects to be hurt. Jim doesn’t question why; “he *knows*. He *always* knew.” While Will is “putting a bandage on his latest scratch, Jim’s ducking, weaving, bouncing away from the [next] knockout blow.”

Charles locks up the library and thinks that Will and Jim are “strangers.” “Go on,” he thinks. “I’ll catch up, some day...” He walks down to the bar on the corner for his “nightly one-and-only drink” and listens to the other patrons talk about the invention of alcohol. “Fire Water, the Elixir Vitae,” they call it. A “Cure-all” given to them by God. It “works miracles,” the bartender says, as he offers Charles a drink. “I don’t need it,” Charles says. “But someone inside me does.” When the bartender asks who, Charles doesn’t answer. “The boy I once was,” he thinks to himself.

CHAPTER 4

Will stops running as the courthouse **clock** “bangs” nine o’clock. All the shops in town are busy closing, and Mr. Tetley, the proprietor of the United Cigar Store, is pushing an old wooden Indian. “Hey!” yells Will and Jim. “Scare you, boys?” Mr. Tetley asks. “Naw!” they reply but Will “shivers.” He can feel “cold tidal waves of strange rain” moving their way, and he wants to get home and layer himself “under sixteen blankets and a pillow” before the storm comes.

Charles’s feels the “sudden urge” to run with the boys because he longs to be young and resents his old age. The shadow that “turns mournfully” in his soul suggests that his youth has in fact died and he is left to grieve the loss.



Charles’s thoughts again underscore Will and Jim’s differences. Will is portrayed as innately good, and Charles’s description of him as a “peach” implies that Will is a sweet and innocent boy. Jim, however, is not a “peach,” and his life experiences make him seem much older than his thirteen years. Jim’s expectation of life’s troubles and dangers suggests that he is not as innocent and naturally “good” as Will.



Charles’s comment that he will “catch up, some day” foretells the end of the novel when he runs happily alongside Will and Jim. His daily nightcap is evidence of his deep unhappiness and implies that he must first dull his pain with alcohol before going home to his much younger family. Still, it isn’t Charles who needs the drink—it is his inner child who is at odds with his current life.



Charles later claims that each tick of the clock represents an opportunity to reject evil and embrace good, and when the courthouse clock “bangs” nine o’clock, it loudly represents another such opportunity. Will’s “shivers” are more evidence of the strange fear that has settled over the town, which makes him want to rush toward the safety of home.



Mr. Tetley hears something far off in the distance, and he is so distracted by the noise that he doesn't notice Will and Jim run off down the street. Next, the boys come across Mr. Crosetti, Green Town's barber, and he has a single tear running down his cheek. "Don't you *smell* it?" he asks the boys. There is a faint smell of cotton candy in the air, and Mr. Crosetti cries because he remembers eating cotton candy as a boy. "Why haven't I stopped to think and smell in the last thirty years?" he wonders. "You're busy, Mr. Crosetti," Will answers. "You haven't got time." The boys take off down the street. "Good night!" they yell back to Mr. Crosetti.

Mr. Tetley's distracted behavior suggests that he is also affected by a strange and subtle fear, and Mr. Crosetti's single tear indicates that he is nostalgic for his own childhood. This makes his disappearance later in the text even more suspicious—since he obviously longs for youth, it is assumed that he too takes a ride on the carousel. Will's comment that Mr. Crosetti doesn't have "time" to think about the past is in keeping with Bradbury's overarching association between age and time, but it also implies that adults can't be bothered with thoughts of youth. The strange and unexpected smell of cotton candy is evidence of the carnival's supernatural power—they won't arrive for another six hours, yet the smell of cotton candy precedes them.



CHAPTER 5

As Charles leaves the bar, his "gray hairs" stand up "like antennae." Outside, a man in a dark suit walks with a roll of paper under his arm, holding a bucket and brush. The man whistles Christmas carols as he hangs something from a telegraph pole. He finishes his work and moves to hang another piece of paper inside an empty store. Charles crosses the street to get a better look, and as he does, the man stares at him and smiles. He gestures toward Charles with an open hand that looks as if it is "covered with fine black silken hair." The man clenches his fist, then waves at Charles and walks away.

Charles's gray hair adds to his image as an old man. Presumably, the man in the dark suit is Mr. Dark (his name and suit are an outward reflection of his inner evil) and at such a distance, Charles mistakes his tattoos for hair. The man whistles Christmas carols perhaps because Halloween is his own version of a holy day to be celebrated. Strangely, Mr. Dark arrives before the carnival, like the cotton candy smell.



Charles crosses the street to the empty store. Inside are two sawhorses, side by side, holding up a block of ice six feet long. There is a spotlight hanging above, and a placard near the window reads: "Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show." The placard identifies the block of ice as one of their "many attractions: THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD!" Charles can remember similar attractions from magician's shows in his childhood. Usually, "frost maidens lay embedded" in the ice waiting to thaw, but this block of ice appears empty, although not quite. A "voluptuous hollow" sits in the center of the ice like a "cold waiting arctic coffin."

When Mr. Fury happens across the very same block of ice later in the text there is a woman embedded in it. Since Charles looks on the same attraction and sees nothing, this suggests that he is not tempted by beautiful women. The carnival's attractions appear different depending on who is looking, and Charles apparently isn't tempted by the sin of lust—he only longs to be young—so he is able to walk right by the world's most beautiful woman.



CHAPTER 6

Jim stops running at the corner of Hickory and Main and looks down the street he and Will have come to call “the Theater.” Something happened on the street the previous summer, and since this “‘thing’ happened,” everything has “changed,” including the houses, the wind, and the taste of the fruit growing on the trees. Jim begs Will to walk by the house with the window that looks in on the “stage with a curtain.” On this stage, “actors” utter “whispers Will does not understand.”

Will remembers that day well. While hanging from a nearby fruit tree with Jim, the two boys could see perfectly into the window with the “peculiar stage where people, all knowing, flourished shirts about their heads, let fall clothes to the rug, stood raw and animal-crazy, naked, like shivering horses, hands out to touch each other.”

Will had absolutely no idea what the people were doing then, and he doesn’t want to look again now. “Will, please,” Jim begs. Will refuses, and Jim calls him a “darn old dimwit Episcopal Baptist” and goes running down the street, towards the house with the “stage.” Will turns and walks “quickly” home.

The fact that Will doesn’t understand what the people are doing is evidence of his youth and innocence, but watching the couple having sex (what happened in the theater) represents his fall from innocence. This fall and the nearby fruit tree carry biblical connotations of Genesis and the fall of man. Adam eats fruit from the tree of knowledge, which allows him to know the difference between good and evil, just as Will and Jim gain knowledge of good and evil through the carnival.



The couple is clearly having sex, and Will and Jim are spying. Like the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge, their spying on this adult act is forbidden. They lose a kind of innocence here, in exchange for adult knowledge.



The fact that Will wants to avoid the house and Jim wants to spy again underscores the boys’ differences. Will is “good” and acts accordingly, but Jim is more easily tempted by things considered sinful.



CHAPTER 7

As Will makes his way home, he hears Jim run up behind him. “Theater closed?” Will asks. “Nobody home,” Jim answers. The two laugh and suddenly a wad of paper blows by and sticks to Jim’s leg. It is a flyer for a traveling carnival, “COMING, OCTOBER TWENTY-FOURTH!” the boys read. “It can’t be,” Will says, carnivals never come after Labor Day. Jim continues reading, excitedly. “MR. ELECTRICO!” he reads. “THE ILLUSTRATED MAN! Hey!” Jim yells. “That’s just an old guy with tattoos,” Will says.

Jim’s excitement can’t be contained. “THE DUST WITCH! What’s a Dust Witch, Will?” he asks. “Dirty old Gypsy—” Will answers. Jim continues reading the flyer, which boasts an Egyptian Mirror Maze— “SEE YOURSELF TEN THOUSAND TIMES”—and Saint Anthony’s Temple of Temptation. Lastly, the flyer promises “THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD.”

Cooger and Dark are “autumn people,” as Charles later explains, and they only travel during the fall months. Autumn, especially October, is associated with evil throughout the novel, and therefore the carnival comes late in the year, long after other carnivals stop traveling. The evil of the carnival is incompatible with summer months, which Bradbury associates with good.



The carnival attractions latch onto the town’s inner desires and use temptation to lure them to evil. The Mirror Maze reflects the patrons’ desires to be either older or younger, and “The Most Beautiful Woman in the World” uses lust to trap the unsuspecting carnival-goers.



"It's not true anyway," Will says. No way is a carnival coming in October. "Who'd go to it?" he asks. "Me," says Jim. Me too, thinks Will. "That music," Jim reminds Will. It must have been calliope music (a kind of circus instrument), he says, and the cotton candy smell—"Must be coming tonight!" Jim shrieks. Will doubts it; carnivals usually set up early in the morning. "Let's go home," Will says to Jim. "We are home!" Jim says, walking up the path to his front door. "Night!" Jim yells, slamming the front door. Will looks to the lightning rod atop the house "glittering against the cold stars." He is glad it is up there.

The lightning rod represents protection from evil and fear, and even though Will doesn't quite know what he is afraid of, it still makes him feel better. Will and Jim show their youth and relative innocence in their excitement over the carnival. While they both long to be older and escape the rules imposed by their parents, they are nevertheless children who enjoy typical children's things.



CHAPTER 8

Will enters the house and shuts the door. He looks in and sees "the only theater he cares for now, the familiar stage" where Charles sits, usually holding a book. His parents look small in the big room and Will equally "wants to be near and not near them." Will's mother sits close to his father, "smelling like fresh milk" and looking "happy." Will doesn't understand how his mother can be "so happy" when his father is "so sad." Will looks to Charles and sees a wadded-up piece of paper in his hand, which Charles quickly shoves deep into his chair. "Anything new, Dad?" he asks.

Charles senses that the carnival is somehow evil, and therefore he hides the flyer from Will to protect him. The tender way in which Will looks at his family reflects his deep affection for them, which is in keeping with Bradbury's argument of the importance of love. Will's desire to be both "near and not near" his parents implies that while he is growing up and becoming a man, he is still also a boy who needs his family to keep him safe.



Charles tells Will that the stone lion on the library steps has blown away and is "prowling the town now, looking for Christians. Won't find any," he says. He has the only Christian "in captivity here, and she's a good cook." As Will's mother laughs, Will climbs the stairs and hears the faint sound of Charles tossing fresh paper into the fire.

Charles's description of his wife as a Christian establishes her as a good person like Will. Charles's story about the stone lion is no doubt an exaggeration, but it does foretell the severity of the storm that is coming in the form of the evil carnival.



At night, Will likes to put his ear to the wall and listen to his parents talking in the next room. He listens to Charles's faint voice, "the sound truth makes being said," like a lesson "and the subject is life." Tonight, Will can hear his father's broken voice: "...Will...makes me feel so *old*...a man should play baseball with his son." Will's mother reassures him, and then Charles says: "Hell, I was forty when he was *born*! And you. Who's your daughter? people say."

Here, Charles makes plain his feelings about his age and growing old. He feels out of place in his young family, and this is the primary source of his deep unhappiness. Until Charles accepts his age and mortality, he will never be at peace.



Will hears Charles go on about a carnival, and Will's mother remarks that it is too late in the year. Their chatter continues. "...most beautiful...woman...in the world," Will hears. There must be a carnival, Will thinks. But it can't be—it is simply too late for carnivals. He opens a library book and tries to read, but he has mixed his own books up with Jim's. Late that night, Will hears his father slip out the front door and go back to the library, and he thinks about his mother "asleep, content, not knowing he has gone."

Charles's insomnia and late-night trips to the library reflect the deep unhappiness he feels because of his age. His much younger wife, on the other hand, is "content," or happy, and she sleeps soundly the whole night through without obsessing about her age and mortality.



CHAPTER 9

Jim sits in his room, library books strewn about, not reading. His eyes are as “dark as twilight,” and the dark circles under his eyes have been there since he nearly died at the age of three, and he “still remembers.” Jim never looked away from the world, “and when you never look away all your life, by the time you are thirteen you have done *twenty* years taking in the laundry of the world.” The door opens. “Jim? You awake?” Jim’s mother asks.

As Jim’s mother enters the room, she warns Jim against keeping his window open and catching cold. “Sure,” he remarks. “Don’t say ‘sure’ that way. You don’t know until you’ve had three children and lost all but one,” his mother replies. Jim tells his mother that he is not having any kids. “No use making more people,” he says. “People die.” He asks his mother if she can remember his father’s face. “Do I look like him?” he asks. “The day you go away is the day he leaves forever,” she answers.

Jim’s mother tells Jim that he should raise a big family when he grows up, that way they can all come visit her. “I’m never going to own anything that can hurt me,” Jim tells her. “You going to collect rocks, Jim?” she asks as she walks out of the room. “Storm,” Jim thinks, “you *there*?” He can feel it coming. He considers climbing to the roof and taking down the lightning rod. “And *then* see what happens!” Jim thinks.

CHAPTER 10

Shortly after midnight, Tom Fury walks down an empty street. His bag of lightning rods is nearly empty, and he is completely “at ease” as he comes across the empty shop with the block of ice inside. From the street, he can see an incredibly beautiful woman encased in the ice. She is “as fair as this morning and fresh as tomorrow’s flowers,” and her beauty takes Fury’s breath away.

Fury remembers his childhood and the beautiful women he saw carved out of marble in Rome and painted into masterpieces hanging in the Louvre, but he has never seen a real woman this beautiful. Even though the woman’s eyes are closed, Fury knows what color they are, and he thinks about melting the ice. He enters the shop and the door closes behind him.

Jim’s dark eyes are an outward reflection of his inner turmoil. His entire life has been shrouded by death—he nearly died as a child, both his siblings have died, and it is implied his father is dead too—and this is the twenty years’ worth of “laundry” that Jim has taken in during his short, but tragic, life.



Jim’s comment that people only die reflects his tragic history, but it also explains his fear of abandonment. Jim later begs Will not to ever leave him, and this fear is seemingly rooted in the death of his father and siblings. In his experience, people are taken away from him, and he wants to hold fast to Will, who makes him feel safe and protected from evil.



Jim expects to be hurt, and therefore he holds most people at arm’s length. If Jim never has children and avoids other close relationships, he avoids the pain that will come when they inevitably leave or die. Jim’s thoughts about taking down the lightning rod again reflect his internal struggle of good and evil. He knows it is best to leave it up, but he still is curious to see what will happen if he takes it down.



Mr. Fury sees a beautiful woman where Charles saw no one, implying that Mr. Fury can be tempted by the sin of lust. As a traveling salesman—one who has sold over 100,000 lightning rods—Mr. Fury has likely not been home (where ever that is) for some time, and he is clearly lonely.



The fact that Mr. Fury seems to inherently know the color of the woman’s eyes suggests that he is familiar with the sin of lust, or perhaps the woman appears to him as someone vaguely recognizable. It’s suggested that he does indeed attempt to melt the ice.



CHAPTER 11

At three a.m., Will wakes to the sound of a train engine. Next door, at the exact same moment, Jim wakes as well. The boys run to their windows and watch as the train begins to appear in the distance. Grabbing binoculars, the boys see that the train is very old—Civil War era old—and has a stack that hasn't been used since 1900.

With the train comes the sound of church music. "Hell," Jim says. "Why would a carnival play church music?" Will's skin breaks out in goosebumps and Jim rushes to get dressed. He jumps out the window and slides down the drainpipe. "Jim! Wait!" Will yells and quickly follows.

The old broken-down train adds to the supernatural nature of the carnival. Bradbury doesn't say exactly what year the novel takes place, but the train is still described as very old and shouldn't be in operation.



Will's goosebumps are more evidence of the deep fear that blankets the town. The carnival is not playing church music—it is actually Chopin's "Funeral March" playing backward.



CHAPTER 12

Will and Jim make it to the rail bridge at the edge of town just as the train crosses. One of the cars carries a "wailing" calliope. "There's no one playing it!" Jim yells. Will looks to the keyboard in confusion and sure enough, there is no one sitting there. "Pearls of ice" erupt from Will's skin as the train's whistle lets out an ungodly "shriek" that brings tears to their eyes and their hands to their ears. Suddenly, the train stops in a field and falls silent.

Although Jim can't see any movement from the train, he can "feel them moving in there." A huge green balloon materializes in the air above the train and Will and Jim can faintly see someone in the basket hanging from the bottom. A man in a dark suit steps from the train's caboose, gestures with his hand, and the train "comes to life." Still, the train's occupants move silently, "like an old movie."

Clouds move in, blocking the moon, and the entire field is covered in darkness. Will and Jim can faintly visualize the carnival workers unloading poles and wires for the tents. "They're bringing out the canvas!" says Will, excitedly. Suddenly, the clouds blow away, and the balloon and men are gone, but in their place stand the carnival tents. "I don't like it," says Will. Jim agrees and a bird screeches in the distance. The boys jump at the sound and run home in a panic.

The calliope playing on its own volition is further evidence of the carnival's supernatural powers. Everything about the approaching carnival builds a mood of growing chaos and evil.



Jim can "feel" the carnival in the darkness, but Will doesn't seem to be able to, which implies again that Jim is less inherently "good" than Will, and more susceptible to temptation. The man in the dark suit is presumably Mr. Dark, who can seemingly be in two places at once.



The darkness of the night mirrors the darkness of the carnival, which makes the "light" Will uncomfortable. While Jim agrees with Will and seems to be frightened by what he witnesses, he is still very curious.



CHAPTER 13

From the empty library, Charles hears the painful shriek of the train's whistle and the "disjointed calliope hymns." He goes to the window and sees Will and Jim running towards home, and in the distance, he can see the carnival "waiting." Charles can see a **carousel** with "night beasts hanging midgallop" and a Mirror Maze. "Three o'clock..." Charles says out loud as his skin becomes "lizard's skin" and his stomach "fills with blood and turns to rust."

"I'll go there," thinks Charles. "I won't go there." He leaves the library and passes the empty shop with the block of ice claiming to hold the most beautiful woman in the world. The sawhorses are "abandoned," and between them is a puddle of water. Only a few ice shards remain and attached to them are strands of long hair. Charles "sees but chooses not to see" and heads in the direction of home.

CHAPTER 14

Back at home, Charles can't imagine why a carnival would come at three in the morning. To Charles, three a.m. is a "special hour." Women aren't up at that time—"they sleep the sleep of babes and children"—but men "know that hour well." Middle aged men frequently wake at this time, and it is when "the body's at low tide." The soul leaves the body at three a.m., creating a sort of "living death," and it is the closest to death one comes without actually dying. Charles remembers reading that "more people in hospitals die at three a.m. than at any other time."

Charles looks to his wife, who is sleeping with a faint smile on her face. "She's immortal," Charles thinks. "She has a son." Charles knows that Will is his son too, but it is different for men. Women "own the good secret" and are "strange wonderful **clocks**" who "nest in Time. They make the flesh that holds fast and binds eternity." Mrs. Halloway stirs in the bed and half-wakes. "You...*all right*... Charlie?" she asks. Charles doesn't answer. He "can't tell her how he is."

CHAPTER 15

The next morning Will and Jim wake and run down to the field. The carnival is still there, and local boys run from attraction to attraction. The train is old and rusted, but it looks normal enough, and the calliope sits silently near the ticket booth. "It's just a plain old carnival," Will says in disbelief.

The mention of three a.m. again carries connotations of evil and witchcraft, and the carousel horses described as "night beasts" reflect the evil and danger of the carousel. Ironically, Charles immediately takes note of the Mirror Maze, which will prove to be, for him at least, the most dangerous attraction. The maze makes Charles appear older than he is, thereby making him desire youth even more.



Charles's desire to both go and not go to the carnival reflects Bradbury's argument that everyone has the capacity for evil. The melted block of ice and rogue hairs imply that Mr. Fury has indeed melted the ice to get to the Most Beautiful Woman in the World, while Charles can simply walk away.



Charles's explanation of three a.m. is precisely why the carnival arrives at this time. Along with the evil connotations of the hour, Mr. Dark is in search of souls to fuel his carnival, so the carnival arrives at a time when the soul is its most vulnerable. The freaks who populate Mr. Dark's sideshows are in a state of "living death" as well—they are alive, yet they can't return to their desired lives.



Charles resents his wife's ability to seemingly live forever, again showing his resentment of his progressive age. His description of his wife as a "strange wonderful clock" is in keeping with Bradbury's association between clocks and life and mortality. Still, Charles can't tell her how he feels because he deeply loves her and doesn't want her to know how badly her youth affects him.



The fact that the carnival now appears normal only serves to heighten Will and Jim's fears. They know what they witnessed the night before, but by the light of day it all appears different.



Walking through the sea of people, Will and Jim see Miss Foley, their seventh-grade teacher. Miss Foley's nephew, Robert, is visiting from Wisconsin and he had run off to the carnival early that morning. "You seen him?" she asks the boys, concerned. They haven't. "I love carnivals," says Miss Foley, like "a little woman lost somewhere in her gray fifties."

Bradbury's description of Miss Foley as a "little woman lost somewhere in her gray fifties" makes her appear old and nostalgic, and her love of carnivals has the same effect. Here, Miss Foley appears as a little girl trapped in an old woman's body, which makes her desire to ride the carousel much more believable.



Miss Foley walks toward the Mirror Maze, searching for Robert. "No," says Will. "No Mirror Maze." Miss Foley asks why, and Will replies, "People get lost." She laughs and slips into the maze. Will and Jim stand at the entrance, their hair on end, and step into the maze. They can see dozens of Miss Foleys reflected in the mirrors, but she seems unaware of the boys. Suddenly, she begins to cry and scream. "Oh God! Help! Help, oh God!"

Will warns Miss Foley to stay out of the Mirror Maze because he senses and fears its danger. Miss Foley risks getting "lost" in the maze because she is reflected as a young child, not as a fifty-year-old woman.



"This way," Will yells, grabbing for Miss Foley in the Mirror Maze. Miss Foley grips his hand and they step out into the sunlight. "My God, did you see her, she's lost, drowned in there, poor girl," Miss Foley cries. The ticket-taker assures them that they were the only people in the maze, but Miss Foley is unconvinced. "I know her," Miss Foley says. "We must find her." Jim looks toward the maze and asks who. "The fact is," Miss Foley replies, "she looked like myself, many, many years ago." She turns to go home, and Will follows. "Will," says Jim. "We're staying until sundown, boy, dark sundown, and figure it all. You chicken?"

The ticket-taker assures Miss Foley that she was the only one in the maze because she was; the reflection she saw was in fact herself as a child, not simply someone who resembles her. Miss Foley's insistence on finding the girl mirrors her own desire to regain her lost youth, as this part of herself has long since "drowned" and become "lost." Once again, Will is repulsed and frightened by the carnival, while Jim is still drawn to it.



CHAPTER 16

All day long Will and Jim ride the carnival rides and play games for prizes, but at sunset, Jim disappears. Will walks around the carnival looking for his friend and stops just outside the Mirror Maze. He steps inside. "...Jim...?" he whispers. He can see Jim's reflection in the mirrors. "Get outa there!" Will yells. He grabs Jim and pulls him outside. "What'd you see in there?" he asks.

Jim disappears because he is drawn to the evil of the Mirror Maze, and Will insists that Jim get out of the maze because he senses this evil and is appropriately afraid. Will's own reflection doesn't seem to be altered within the maze, suggesting that he isn't as eager to grow up as Jim is.



Jim is shaken. "Can't tell you, Will, wouldn't believe," he says in a daze. It is nearly dinnertime, and the boys should head for home. "Will, we got to come back. Tonight—" Jim says. Will refuses and Jim stops walking. "You wouldn't let me come alone. You're always going to be around, aren't you, Will? To protect me?" Jim asks. Will already knows the "familiar answers: yes, yes, you know it, yes, yes."

Presumably, Jim's reflection in the Mirror Maze is that of a grown man, and this is why he doesn't think Will will believe him. Jim asks Will to protect him because he knows that he is vulnerable to the evil of the carnival and he needs Will's goodness and purity to counteract it. Will knows he will never leave Jim—their friendship is too strong.



CHAPTER 17

Will and Jim turn and nearly trip over an abandoned leather bag. Will kicks it and it makes “a sound of iron indigestion.” The bag belongs to Mr. Fury, the lightning-rod salesman, they realize. “Storm never came,” Jim says. “But he went.” The boys are puzzled. Who forgets and leaves their bag lying around? “This is everything that old man owned. Something important—” Jim says, “made him forget.” Still, Will and Jim wonder, who does that?

CHAPTER 18

The carnival goers all go home for dinner and the carnival midway looks deserted. Jim and Will pass the **carousel** and notice a large sign reading: “OUT OF ORDER! KEEP OFF!” Jim doesn’t believe it. “Don’t look broke to me,” he says, climbing on the carousel. “Ho, boy, git!” someone yells. A strange man grabs Jim and lifts him clear off the ground. “Help, Will, help!” Jim yells. As Will runs to his aid, the man lifts Will up too. “Out of order,” he says. “Can’t you read?”

“Put them down,” a second man says “gently.” “The name is Dark,” he says, and produces a white business card that quickly turns blue and then red. Mr. Dark introduces the other man as Mr. Cooger: they are the proprietors of the carnival. Mr. Dark rolls up his sleeves and Jim notices several colorful tattoos on his wrists. “What’s your name, boy,” Mr. Dark asks Jim. “Simon,” he lies. “Show’s over,” Mr. Dark says. He tells Jim to come back after supper and ride the **carousel** when it is fixed. “Take this card,” Mr. Dark says. “Free ride.”

Jim and Will run from the **carousel** and quickly climb a tree, secretly watching Dark and Cooger mill about the ride. Mr. Dark goes to the control box, looks around, “glares into the tree,” and engages the controls. The carousel lurches backwards, and the calliope begins to play a backward tune. Mr. Cooger jumps onto the carousel, and the boys watch as his face begins to “melt like pink wax.” He grows younger and younger as the ride moves backward, and soon he is no longer the forty-year-old man who lifted the boys. The carousel stops and Cooger is twelve years old. He looks around and takes off running down the empty midway. Jim and Will jump from the tree and follow.

Of course, the storm did come, in the form of the carnival, but Will and Jim have not yet made this connection. Mr. Fury didn’t forget his bag—he gave into temptation and melted the block of ice to get to the beautiful woman, effectively becoming one of Mr. Dark’s freaks.



Mr. Cooger’s incredible strength when he easily lifts both boys off the ground makes his later transition into the decrepit and frail Mr. Electrico all the more striking. The carousel is “out of order” not because it is broken, but because Mr. Dark controls who rides and who doesn’t. Only those tempted to become older or younger ride the carousel.



Mr. Dark and Mr. Cooger have a sort of good cop/bad cop routine, which serves to further trap the boys and entice them to the carnival. Jim gives Mr. Dark a fake name because, like Will, he senses the danger of the carnival. Mr. Dark likewise senses that Jim is more vulnerable to evil and sin, which is why he gives Jim a free pass to ride the carousel and not Will.



Of course, Mr. Dark knows that the boys are hiding in the tree, and he wants them to see what the carousel is capable of. Mr. Dark tempts them with the carousel’s supernatural ability to make them their desired age simply by riding it in the appropriate direction. When Mr. Cooger stops and looks around before running away, he is also tempting the boys. If they follow Mr. Cooger to Miss Foley’s house where he is posing as her nephew, Robert, it will only increase Jim’s interest in the carnival.



CHAPTER 19

As Jim and Will chase a twelve-year-old Mr. Cooger down the street, they can't believe what they have just witnessed. "Twenty-eight!" yells Jim. "Twenty-eight times!" Will had been counting too, and he never once took his eyes off Mr. Cooger. Suddenly the man/boy turns and runs down Miss Foley's street, then he turns and runs right through her front door.

"Her nephew...?" questions Will. Impossible, says Jim. "You see his face?" Jim asks. "The eyes, Will! That one part of people don't change, young, old, six or sixty! Boy's face, sure, but the eyes were the eyes of Mr. Cooger!" As the boys approach the house the front door opens and Miss Foley steps out. She smiles down at the boys. "Robert?" she yells into the house. "Come meet two of my students."

Robert steps out of the house. "We got to tell you a terrible thing," Will blurts out to Miss Foley. Jim elbows Will to "shut him up," and suddenly, Will remembers seeing a sign outside of Mr. Crosetti's shop: "CLOSED ON ACCOUNT OF ILLNESS." Will tells Miss Foley that Mr. Crosetti has died. "What...the barber?" Miss Foley asks. "What a shame." Jim offers his hand to Robert. "You look familiar," Jim says.

Jim shakes Robert's hand and finds himself staring into Mr. Cooger's eyes. "I'm taking Aunt Willa to the carnival," Robert says. "Join us?" Will makes a quick excuse and the boys quickly run from the porch. Once they have reached a safe distance, Will tells Jim that he has finally figured out why the calliope music has been bothering him. It was Chopin's "Funeral March" backwards, he says. "Mr. Cooger was marching away from the grave," Will says, "not toward it." The boys turn and run down the street.

CHAPTER 20

Jim and Will finally get home and their parents are angry that they have been gone so long. Both boys are sent to their rooms. "Will..." Charles says to his son, "...be careful." Will waits in his room. It is too early to sneak down the drainpipe, but soon Charles will leave for his nightly trip to the library. When the coast is finally clear, Will sneaks outside and tosses a few rocks at Jim's window. He waits, but Jim never appears at the window.

Each turn of the carousel represents one year of aging, and Mr. Cooger rides the carousel exactly twenty-eight turns backward so he can become twelve years old, the age of Miss Foley's nephew.



The eyes, often referred to as the window to the soul, don't change because Robert is still the evil Mr. Cooger. Will also identifies the Dwarf as Mr. Fury because of his eyes, and this underscores Charles's later realization that riding the carousel doesn't change who a rider is on the inside.



Of course, Will doesn't know for sure that Mr. Crosetti has died; rather, he seems to sense it, like the evil of the carnival. Whether or not Mr. Crosetti dies never is revealed, but Bradbury implies that he took a ride on the carousel.



Robert intends to take Miss Foley to the carnival because, like Jim, she can easily be tempted to ride the carousel. Miss Foley wants to be young again and the carnival offers this possibility. Chopin's "Funeral March," also known as Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, was not initially associated with funerals until it was played at Chopin's own funeral in 1849. This allusion to death increases the boys' fear of the carnival.



Charles's warning implies that he knows Will is in danger. Even though Will is depicted as exceedingly good, he still chooses to disobey his parents and sneak out of the house late at night, which underscore's Bradbury's argument that even the purest souls are capable of wrongdoing. This kind of sneaking out is also closely linked to growing up and finding one's independence.



CHAPTER 21

Alone in his room, Will hears a distant **clock** strike ten. Jim always comes to the window, he thinks. What is going on? The minutes pass and Will faintly hears the “funeral dirge” playing backwards from the old calliope. Suddenly, Jim’s window opens. Jim slips down to the yard without noticing Will and begins to walk down the street. “Ditching me!” Will thinks as he slides down the drainpipe. He begins to follow Jim and they stop right in front of Miss Foley’s house.

Chopin’s “Funeral March” serves as a type of siren song to draw Jim to the carousel. As Will hears a clock strike in the distance, this references Charles’s explanation of each tick of the clock being another opportunity to embrace good and reject evil. Will can either stay home and do as his parents say, or he can sneak out and follow Jim.



CHAPTER 22

Will hides in the bushes as Jim softly yells toward the windows. “Hey there...hey...” he says. Will jumps from the bushes. “Jim!” he shouts. “Get out of here. My gosh, he’ll chew and spit out your bones.” Will tries to pull Jim away from Miss Foley’s yard but he doesn’t budge. “Will, go home! You’ll spoil everything.” The boys struggle and fight and Jim yells to his friend: “Willy, if you don’t let go, I’ll remember when—” he stops midsentence. “When *what!*” Will asks. “When I’m older, darn it, *older!*” Jim answers.

Jim’s comment that he will remember when he is older suggests that he has come to find Robert so that he can ride the carousel. If the carousel can make Mr. Cooger younger, he figures that it can make him older as well. When Jim is older, he will also be stronger, and he hopes that this threat will intimidate Will.



Will imagines Jim on the **carousel**, moving forward until he is a man of twenty, and then Will hauls off and punches Jim in the face. As Will and Jim fight, the front door opens and Robert steps out. He looks down at Will and Jim, smiles, and runs back inside. He appears again in a second-floor window and throws something down to the grass below. Gold and diamonds “rain” down from the window and Robert barrels out the front door. “Help, police!” he yells.

Will attempts to knock some sense into Jim by hitting him. Robert tries to frame Will and Jim for stealing Miss Foley’s jewelry—this way they will be discredited if they should tell Miss Foley, or anyone else, of her nephew’s real identity as Mr. Cooger.



Jim and Will see that the grass is littered with rings, necklaces, and other jewelry and suddenly Miss Foley steps outside. “Who’s there!” she yells. “Jim? Will? What’s *that* you got?!” The boys take off running and can hear Miss Foley screaming behind them: “Will Holloway! Jim Nightshade! Night runners! Thieves!”

A “night runner,” or a criminal who prowls the night looking for trouble, marks both Jim and Will as criminals. This association between the night and evil is further reflected in Mr. Dark’s name and the 3 a.m. arrival of the carnival.



CHAPTER 23

Robert runs down the street with Will and Jim close behind. Will knows that Jim won’t be of any help if they catch the imposter nephew. “Jim isn’t running after nephews. He is running toward free rides.” As Robert runs toward the carnival, he disappears behind a tent and the old **carousel** jerks into action, this time in forward motion. Jim stops and stares at the ride.

Jim isn’t yet interested in stopping or destroying the threat of evil because he still wants to ride the carousel and instantly become a man. The carousel begins to move in a forward motion to further tempt Jim to board it and ride.



Will watches as Jim readies himself to jump on the **carousel**. “Jim!” cries Will. “No!” Will runs and tackles him. The boys struggle to their feet and Will slaps Jim hard across the face. “Jim, he’ll kill us!” Will yells. “Not me, no!” Jim answers. Will feels a “sting of electricity” and steps back, hitting a switch on the control box. Lightning pierces the sky and merry-go-round begins moving faster. Will sees the evil Robert fly by, “cursing” and “spitting” at them.

Bolts of electricity fly from the control box of the **carousel** and Jim and Will watch as Robert continues to zip by, aging with each turn. Lights flicker in the carnival tents and the carousel picks up speed. “In a final vomit,” the control box blows clean apart and the merry-go-round grinds to a halt. “How many times,” wonders Will, “did it go around?” It was too fast to count, but it must have been well over ninety. Slowly the boys approach the ride and find Mr. Cooger, aged to over one hundred, “cold as an albino frog.” After Will throws up over the side of the merry-go-round, the boys run away fast down the empty midway.

CHAPTER 24

Inside a “coffin sized phone booth” Will phones the police and an ambulance. Minutes later, Jim is leading the police and ambulance attendants down the midway, talking wildly. “He’s got to be alive,” Jim says. “We didn’t mean to do it!” When they arrive at the **carousel**, Mr. Cooger is nowhere to be found. “He was here, we swear!” cries Jim. He starts yelling for Mr. Cooger in the direction of the tents. “We brought *help!*” Jim screams. Suddenly, the lights tun on in the Freak Tent and they slowly enter.

As they enter, Will sees four men playing cards at a table. One of them is a Dwarf so small, his face cannot be fully seen from behind his cards. The Dwarf seems familiar to Will. “Where? Who? What?” Will thinks. The tent is filled with freaks, and near the back, Mr. Dark sits shirtless and illustrated, adding another tattoo to the palm of his left hand. Behind him lurks a large electric chair. Suddenly, the Dwarf drops his cards. “The lightning-rod salesman,” thinks Will. “Oh, God, what they’ve done to him!”

Jim’s comment that Cooger and Dark won’t kill him implies that he knows they will kill Will, yet this isn’t enough to keep him away. Will’s “sting of electricity,” which foretells Robert’s upcoming transformation into Mr. Electrico, also suggests that Will is deeply hurt by Jim’s comment. Will loves Jim and values his life and friendship, but Jim’s willingness to sacrifice Will for his own desire to be older suggests that Jim feels differently.



Will and Jim believe that they have killed Mr. Cooger, and they want to put as much distance between themselves and the carnival as possible. Will is deeply affected by what he has witnessed and the realization that he has potentially been a party to murder, and it makes him physically ill.



The phone booth, described as a coffin, reflects the fact that Will and Jim fear that they have killed Mr. Cooger, but Jim’s hope that he is still alive is not a reflection of his guilt. Jim still wants to ride the carousel and he is worried that he will get in trouble and be kept from the carnival. His obsession with the carousel is growing.



Will thinks that the Dwarf looks familiar, but he doesn’t fully identify him as Mr. Fury until his able to see his face and his eyes. Just like when Mr. Cooger transforms into Robert, the eyes do not change. It’s suggested that the salesman is effectively trapped inside the body of the Dwarf and is being held against his will by the evil Mr. Dark. This has larger implication regarding where all the “freaks” come from.



"Gentlemen!" Mr. Dark cries. "We're rehearsing all our new acts!" The police look past Mr. Dark to the figure sitting in the electric chair. "Who's he?" they ask. Mr. Dark explains that it is Mr. Electrico, the new act. "One hundred thousand volts will now burn Mr. Electrico's body!" claims Mr. Dark, and the shock will spark him to life. Mr. Dark flips the switch near the chair and the old man "blazes like a blue autumn tree." Suddenly, the old man comes alive.

"...welcome...mmmmmm..." Mr. Electrico stammers. "I...sssaw...the...boysssss...ssssneak into...thee...tent...ttttt..." he begins. He goes on to tell the police that he had only pretended to be dead to scare the boys. "Oh, sure," one of the policemen says. "Fine show." Mr. Dark approaches Will and Jim and gives them a dozen free passes. "Your names?" he asks. "Simon," Jim lies again "Simon Smith." Will follows suit. "Oliver," he says. "Oliver Brown." Mr. Dark looks down at them. "Free rides. Free rides. Come any time. Come back. Come back" he says. Will and Jim grab the tickets and run out of the tent. When the police get in their car, the boys are "huddled in the back."

CHAPTER 25

Miss Foley paces her house thinking about what to do about Will, Jim, "and...the nephew." She stops. "Strange," she thinks. "Why not say my nephew?" Since Robert's arrival, she hasn't been able to shake the feeling that "he didn't belong, his proof was not proof." She looks to the **carousel** ticket in the living room. "ADMIT ONE," it reads. Despite her doubts about Robert, she can't wait to ride the carousel. Miss Foley goes to the telephone, calls Charles at the library, and tells him to meet her at the police station.

CHAPTER 26

The police drop Will and Jim off near two dark houses, and they pretend to run inside as the cops drive away. Will had thrown his carnival tickets as they ran from the freak tent, but Jim still holds his tight. Will tells Jim about the Dwarf resembling Mr. Fury. "If only there was *still* some way to apologize to Mr. Cooger—" Jim says. Will can't believe his ears. "You still don't see we can't do business with those ulmers and goffs!" Will cries to Jim.

Mr. Electrico "blazes like a blue autumn tree," mirroring Bradbury's association between autumn and evil. The earthly authorities of the police seem to have no power in the face of Mr. Dark's supernatural abilities.



Again, Mr. Dark gives the boys free passes to entice them and encourage them to ride the carousel—but it's suggested that when they do, they too will become one of Mr. Dark's freaks. The carnival cannot survive without new souls to fuel it, and Mr. Dark senses the boys'—especially Jim's—desire to instantly be men and skip childhood. Still, both boys lie and offer false names, showing their fear of Mr. Dark and the carnival.



Clearly, Miss Foley senses that Robert is not who he claims to be, yet her own desire to regain her youth is so strong that she doesn't heed the warning of his evil presence. Like the free tickets Mr. Dark gives to Will and Jim, Miss Foley's carousel ticket tempts her to ride. While Miss Foley is likely still unaware of the physical transformation that riding the carousel will induce, she longs to feel younger, even if only for the duration of the ride.



Will throws his tickets away because he is able to resist the temptation of the carousel, at least in one moment of conviction. Jim, however, is willing to ride the carousel despite the danger that it clearly poses. Will refers to the carnival as "ulmers and goffs," the monsters from his own dreams.



Jim stares at Will. “Why, maybe even Mr. Crosetti—” Will says, stopping midsentence. Jim suggests the barber is simply on vacation. Will reminds Jim of the sign. “He eat too much candy out at the show?” Will asks. “He get seasick on everybody’s favorite ride?” Will tells Jim that he knows Jim plans to ride the **carousel** and “ditch” him. Jim tenderly touches Will’s arm and reassures him that he won’t leave him.

Will continues to plead with Jim to stay away from the **carousel**. “Everything in its time,” Will continues, “like the preacher said only last month, everything one by one, not two by two, will you remember?”

Will and Jim hear voices from the police station, and they can see Miss Foley sitting next to Charles. “You saw their faces?” Will’s father asks. Miss Foley confirms, but she neglects to mention Robert. She doesn’t want to press charges, she says, but if they aren’t guilty, where are they? “Here!” Will yells, running toward the station.

CHAPTER 27

Charles walks Jim and Will home from the police station. He doesn’t see the point in waking up Jim’s mother if he promises to tell her everything in the morning. Charles asks if Jim can get in without waking her. “Sure,” he says. “Look what we got.” Jim moves aside the ivy growing on the house and reveals the iron rungs of a ladder running up to his room. Charles laughs and admits he had a similar setup as a kid. As Jim scurries up the ladder, Charles turns to his son. “You know what I hate most of all, Will?” he asks. “Not being able to run anymore, like you.”

As Charles and Will approach their house, Charles looks at the ivy. “Our place, too?” he asks. “Our place, too,” Will says as he moves the ivy, revealing his own ladder. Charles says that Will is “not *acting* guilty,” and he knows he didn’t steal anything. Will confirms, and his father asks why he admitted to something he didn’t do. “Nobody’ll believe what we say,” Will says. “I’ll believe,” Charles replies. Will begins to tell his father about the carnival but stops. He promises to tell tomorrow. “Mom’s honor,” Will says. “Good enough for me,” Charles replies.

“Everybody’s favorite ride” is a clear reference to the carousel. Presumably, Mr. Crosetti has already been transformed into a younger version of himself and can’t go back to his former life. Though Jim is still longing for the carousel, he is also held back by his connection with Will.



Will’s plea is in keeping with one of Bradbury’s central arguments: that age and time shouldn’t be rushed.



Will’s willingness to turn himself in to the police is more evidence of his goodness and general obedience to authority. Jim would rather avoid the police and Miss Foley, but Will is ready to confess—even if he isn’t guilty.



Jim’s makeshift ladder makes Charles nostalgic and inspires him to admit to Will that he hates being old and longs to run and play again. At the same time, Jim’s ladder is more evidence of his desire to grow up before his time. The ladder means that he can come and go as he pleases and avoid his mother and the rules that she imposes on him.



The fact that Will too has a makeshift ladder implies that he still occasionally chooses to be “bad” and disobey his parents—he too is growing up and longing for independence. Will swears on his mother’s honor, highlighting the power of familial love to keep a person on the right path.



CHAPTER 28

Instead of going inside, Will and Charles sit together on the front porch. “Dad?” Will asks. “Am I a good person?” Charles tells his son that he is sure of it, and Will asks if being good will “help when things get really tough.” Charles assures him that being good in the face of evil will help, but it may not be enough. “Good is no guarantee for your body. It’s mainly for peace of mind,” Charles says.

“Are you a good person?” Will asks Charles. After some thought, Charles tells his son that he is “all right.” Will is confused. “Then, Dad,” he says, “why aren’t you happy?” Charles explains that being good and being happy are two different things. Often, he says, those who appear the happiest have the most sin. “And men *do* love sin, Will,” Charles says, “oh how they love it, never doubt, in all shapes, sizes, colors, and smells.”

Charles continues. “So, minute by minute, hour by hour [...] you got the choice this second” to be either good or bad. “That’s what the **clock** ticks,” Charles says, “that’s what it says in the ticks.” Will tells his father that he wants him to be happy, and that he would do “anything” to make him happy. “Just tell me I’ll live forever,” Charles says. “That would do nicely.” Will asks Charles what doesn’t make him sad. “Death,” Charles answers.

Will is shocked. Death is sad, he tells Charles. His father explains that “death makes everything else sad. But death itself only scares.” Will begs his father not to go near the carnival, and Charles tells Will the same. As they stand to go inside, Charles motions towards the iron ladder. “They way you came out,” Charles says, “is the way you go in.” Will asks Charles if he is climbing the ladder too, and he quickly answers “no, no.” Will smiles. “You ain’t got the *stuff!*” he whispers. Will and Charles both scramble up the ladder, “laughing without sound.”

CHAPTER 29

After only one hour of sleep, Will shoots straight up in bed. “The lightning rod!” he yells. “It’s *gone!*” He half-noticed it was missing earlier, without even thinking, but now he is certain—Jim has taken the rod down. Will hears a faint sound, not with his ears, but with “the hairs on the back of his neck,” and he thinks about the carnival’s air balloon. Will “senses” Jim move next door, and Jim likewise senses Will. Both boys move to their windows as the balloon floats by.

This conversation again reflects Bradbury’s argument that good and evil are choice. Will may be naturally good, but he is still capable of choosing to be evil. Charles also recognizes that being good doesn’t always mean succeeding in life—often the world rewards the sinners.



Here, Charles explains the temptation of sin and the instant gratification that the carousel promises. His explanation suggests that being good is often a difficult and painful choice that does not automatically mean that one will be happy. This is apparently reflected in Charles’s own unhappiness.



Charles’s unhappiness is seemingly a direct result of his old age and distantly approaching death. Charles has difficulty accepting his age and longs to be immortal, like the way he sees his wife. Charles’s meditations on the nature of death form an important part of the novel.



Death scares Charles because it represents the ultimate unknown. As Charles follows Will up the ladder, he essentially ignores his age and behaves like a child. In that moment, Charles accepts his age and is happy, as evidenced by his silent laughter. Moreover, Charles’s ability to climb the ladder suggests that he isn’t quite as old as he feels.



Without the lightning rod, Jim isn’t protected from the evil of the carnival, and this makes them both vulnerable to Mr. Dark (although Mr. Fury obviously wasn’t protected either). The balloon is another example of something that is usually childlike and fun but twisted to evil purposes by the carnival.



Will and Jim know that the balloon is searching for them, and they can make out a figure in the hanging basket. Inside the basket is the Dust Witch, one of Mr. Dark's freaks. The Dust Witch is blind, but she can feel, taste, and hear different souls. "Now they know where we live!" exclaims Jim. They hear a loud dragging noise from the roof of Jim's house, and the balloon floats away.

The Dust Witch's ability to sense different souls despite her blindness shows a new aspect of the carnival's supernatural powers. Since the Witch is blind, she must mark Jim's house in such a way that she can find her way back with Mr. Dark.



Will and Jim quickly climb up to the roof and see a thick streak of "evil mercury paint" on the shingles, like "a track a snail paints on a sidewalk." As Jim begins to panic, Will climbs down and grabs a garden hose. Up on the roof, Will washes away the evil stain. "I'm a fool," Jim cries. "Why didn't I leave it up?" "Lightning hasn't struck yet," Will reminds him.

The Witch's mark is evil, yet Will remains levelheaded and instantly knows how to counteract it. Will's comment that "lightning hasn't struck yet" implies that they now understand that the storm Mr. Fury referred to is the carnival, and there is still a chance they can destroy it.



CHAPTER 30

After cleaning the roof, Will and Jim can see the balloon hovering in the distance. The boys climb down and go back to their rooms, where Will stays awake thinking. He doesn't know what to do exactly, but he knows he must act before the carnival does. "Sorry, Dad," Will thinks as he grabs a bow and arrow and sneaks out his window.

Will apologizes to his father before he slips out the window because he knows that it is against the rules to be out so late. In this way, Will makes the active choice to be "bad" and disobey his father, but he is also trying to do a more important kind of good work in defeating the carnival.



Will knows that the Witch can sense what he is doing. While she can't exactly read his thoughts, she "can feel" what he is up to. "Witch," Will thinks, "come back." He sees the balloon begin to move closer and, not wanting to lead the Witch to his own house, he runs down the street to an abandoned house and climbs on the roof. "Witch," he thinks, "here!" The Dust Witch floats towards the house, and just as the basket scrapes the roof, Will pulls back the bow. The weapon snaps and breaks in half.

Will merely thinks about his intentions in the presence of the Witch, just as Charles does later at the carnival, and the Witch's "special blindness" allows her to access his thoughts.



Will grabs the basket of the balloon and reaches up with the arrow, piercing the balloon. As air escapes, the Dust Witch wails and grabs at her face as though in pain. Will releases the basket and the balloon "whistles" away. Relieved, Will jumps from the roof to a nearby tree and watches as the balloon floats, wounded, back to the carnival.

Will is obviously afraid. After all, he's been covered in cold sweat and goosebumps for most of the day, but he stands up to the Witch and confronts his fear head on, which implies that fear only has the power one allows it to have. Once Will faces the Witch, he is able to thwart her efforts and destroy the balloon.



CHAPTER 31

Will returns home, and the rest of the night is quiet.

This chapter is only a single sentence long, denoting the passing of time.



CHAPTER 32

The next morning, while rain drenches Green Town and the carnival grounds, the **carousel** “suddenly spasms to life.” Hearing the calliope music, Miss Foley “hurries” out her front door and heads toward the carnival.

That same morning Will and Jim find a terrified young girl weeping under a tree. They don’t immediately recognize her, but the girl knows who they are. “Jim! Will! Oh God, it’s you!” she cries. Jim begins to leave, but Will convinces him to stay. Obviously, the girl needs help, Will argues. Suddenly, Will realizes who the girl is. “I know who you are,” he tells her. “But I got to check.”

Will and Jim run down the street to Miss Foley’s house. They step inside and yell loudly, but no one is home. “She’s gone out to shop,” reasons Jim. “No,” says Will. “We know where she is.” Suddenly, the boys hear Chopin’s “Funeral March” playing backward. Running outside, they can see the carnival parade coming up the street, just like in Jim’s dream. They know it’s not really a parade—it is a search party. The boys hide in the bushes as the carnival passes by, and then they run back to the tree to find Miss Foley gone.

Miss Foley “hurries” to the carousel, suggesting that she can’t wait to ride and be young again. Like Jim, the calliope music lures her onwards.



The fact that Will wants to stay and help the young girl while Jim wants to leave is further evidence of the boys’ different natures and Will’s innate goodness. For all intents and purposes, the girl is a stranger, yet Will is compelled to stay and help her despite not initially recognizing her.



Miss Foley has been abducted by Mr. Dark and forced to become one of his sideshow freaks. No one, other than Will and Jim, will ever believe that she is really a fifty-year-old woman, and now that she is a child, she is unable to care for herself. In this way, Miss Foley sacrifices her autonomy as well as her life experiences when she chooses to ride the carousel, a benefit of age she failed to appreciate before.



CHAPTER 33

The telephone rings and Charles answers it. Will is on the other end of the line, and he frantically tells his father that he and Jim won’t be home for a few days. They must hide “until they go away.” Charles is confused. Who, he asks, but Will doesn’t answer. “Wish me luck,” Will says as he hangs up the phone. “Luck,” Charles says to the disconnected phonenumber.

Will telephones Charles and tells him that he won’t be home, again showing Will’s thoughtfulness. Presumably, Jim does not call his own mother and she will likely worry about him. Charles places an inordinate amount of trust in his son’s decisions.



CHAPTER 34

The old wooden Indian outside of the United Cigar Store casts a long shadow on an iron grille in the sidewalk, and beneath the grille, Jim and Will hide. It is the perfect place, Will says. Mr. Dark will never find them here. As Will watches the familiar shoes of Charles pass over the grille, a young boy drops his gum and squats to save it. Will and Jim can hear the carnival passing by, and it suddenly “halts.” Mr. Dark and the freaks disperse into the crowd of spectators, searching for Will and Jim. “Look, Ma!” the small boy says, pointing to the grille. “There!”

If the little boy continues to make a fuss by the grille, he will likely give away Will and Jim’s hiding spot, as the scene grows more frightening and suspenseful. Luck seems to be on the side of the powerful Mr. Dark for now.



CHAPTER 35

Charles sits in the local bar drinking a cup of coffee. He hasn't slept all night, and he is exhausted. As he orders another cup, a man walks in and sits next to him. The man has "a single eye tattooed on the back of each finger."

Meanwhile, Jim and Will sit below the grille as the young boy continues to point and yell to his mother. "Down there! Look!" he insists. Will can see the freaks walking by the grille, including the Dwarf. "Oh Mr. Fury," Will thinks, "what they've done to you." As the young boy's mother drags him away from the grille, the Dwarf follows and walks away.

Back in the bar, The Illustrated Man stares at Charles. The bartender offers the stranger a drink, but he says he is only looking for two boys. "Who isn't?" Charles thinks as he exits the bar. Charles walks down to the cigar shop and buys a cigar from Mr. Tetley. As Charles stops outside the shop to light the cigar, he notices two shadows beneath the grille. "Jim? Will!" Charles cries. "What the hell's going on?" The Illustrated Man approaches from across the street.

The Illustrated Man tells Charles that he is searching for two boys. The boys have won unlimited free passes to the carnival, and it would be a shame if they missed out, the man says. The strange man holds out his palms, and Charles sees two tattoos—one of Will and one of Jim—covering the man's palms. Charles quickly gives the man two fake names, but the man knows he is lying. "We found the names of the boys ten minutes ago," he says. "Just wanted to double-check." He tells Charles that the boys' names are Will and Jim, but he doesn't know their last names. The man clenches his fists, and Jim and Will "thrash in agony" below.

The Dust Witch approaches and stands near the grille. "Dad!" thinks Will. "Do something!" The Witch is sure to feel their presence beneath the grille, and Will and Jim begin to panic. Suddenly, Charles lights his cigar. "Now, this is a fine cigar!" he says, blowing a huge cloud of smoke into the Witch's face. The witch begins to cough and choke, and then she quickly walks away.

This man is Mr. Dark, and while tattoos of eyes are usually meant to ward off evil, here they are a symbol of his wicked and seemingly all-seeing nature.



Will's comment is another reflection of his kind and good character. Will barely knows Mr. Fury, yet he still laments what has become of him, even though he is now working on behalf of the evil Mr. Dark and seeks to cause Will harm.



Illustrated Man seems to somehow know who Charles is, and believes that Charles will lead him to Will and Jim. This mysterious ability only adds to Charles's fear, which continues to build as the Illustrated Man follows him across the street. Jim and Will seem to have become a priority for Mr. Dark by now.



The Illustrated Man's tattoos function much like a voodoo doll, and in this vein, the tattoos serve as Will and Jim's effigies. The Illustrated Man can inflict physical pain upon the boys simply by manipulating the images that are tattooed upon his skin. But Mr. Dark nonetheless needs Charles's help to find the boys, and when Charles refuses, he effectively faces his fear.



Charles is obviously afraid and doesn't know what Mr. Dark and the Witch are capable of, but he stands up to them anyway. By blowing smoke into the Witch's face, he gives Will and Jim another chance to escape.



“Your name, sir?” the Illustrated Man asks. “Halloway,” Charles answers. “Work in the library. Drop by sometime.” The Illustrated Man walks away, and Charles speaks, inconspicuously, to the boys below. He tells them to stay hidden for the day and meet him later at the library, after he has had a chance to find out who, or what, the carnival is. He walks off, leaving Will and Jim below the grille.

Charles continues to face his fear and does not lie to Mr. Dark. Instead, Charles tells him where he works because he knows that Mr. Dark will come looking later, and Charles is ready to challenge him.



CHAPTER 36

Outside the cigar shop, Mr. Dark drops to his knees and examines the metal grille, looking down to the littered candy and gum wrappers below. “Lose something,” Mr. Tetley asks. The shop owner tells the stranger that he cleans the grate monthly. “How much you lose? Dime? Quarter? Half dollar?” As Mr. Dark looks up, Mr. Tetley’s cash register pings: “NO SALE.”

Mr. Dark and the freaks’ supernatural powers mean that they have discovered Will and Jim’s hiding spot. But as Mr. Tetley’s cash register pings “NO SALE,” it reflects the fact that the boys have already moved on, and Mr. Dark can’t have their souls just yet.



CHAPTER 37

At seven o’clock, Charles waits in the library for Will and Jim. It has been the “longest day of all the days he can remember.” He spent the day at the carnival, walking around and avoiding the rides and attractions, and now he stares at the “great literary clock” he has arranged on the table. He has placed several books on the table in the shape of a clockface. At twelve o’clock is a copy of *Dr. Faustus*, and at six sits a history of circuses. At nine is a book on demons, and several other texts about the occult are positioned on the makeshift clock. Still, the carnival is a mystery. “By the pricking of my thumbs,” Charles thinks. “Something wicked this way comes.”

Each book on Charles’s “great literary clock” represents an attempt to overcome evil and commit to good, much like the individual ticks of a clock being another chance to renounce evil and embrace good. This is the second time that Bradbury mentions Dr. Faustus, which sits at the top of the clock, indicating its importance and connection to the story. Like the title character of Marlowe’s story, if Jim or Will ride the carousel, they will effectively be making a pact with the devil. This passage also references the quote that gives the novel its title: words spoken by the witches in Shakespeare’s [Macbeth](#).



CHAPTER 38

Will and Jim spend the day in hiding. They hide in barns and garages, and they even stop by the police station and loiter for a while in a church steeple. When they arrive at the library, they find Charles in the back room, staring at the clock made of books. “From the beginning,” Charles says to the boys. “Please.” Will and Jim tell him everything from the carnival to Miss Foley. “I believe,” Charles says.

Charles easily believes the boys’ stories, offering more proof of his own inner child and his desire to be young again. Most adults would likely dismiss the boys’ story as a product of their childish imaginations, but Charles instantly believes and tries to help.



Charles then shows Will and Jim a series of old newspaper advertisements for Cooger and Dark’s carnival. The first is dated October 12, 1888, and he has found two more dated 1860 and 1846. The most recent advertisement is in a newspaper dated October 1910, “and October now, tonight,” Charles says. “...Beware the autumn people...”

While the exact year that the novel takes place is not given, according to the newspaper clippings, Cooger and Dark have been collecting souls and riding the carousel for over a century.



“What?” Will and Jim ask, puzzled. Charles tells the boys about an old religious story he heard as a child in which evil people associated with the fall “sift the human storm for souls.” According to Charles, these evil people “eat flesh of reason” and “fill tombs with sinners.” If Mr. Dark and his freaks are autumn people, Will asks, “does that make us...*summer* people?” No, says Charles, “there are times when we’re all autumn people.”

CHAPTER 39

“Oh gosh,” cries Will. “It’s hopeless!” Charles disagrees. “The very fact that we’re here worrying about the difference between summer and autumn, makes me sure there’s a way out,” he says. Charles explains to the boys that they “don’t have to be evil.” Mr. Dark doesn’t “hold all the cards,” he says. Mr. Dark is afraid too, Charles can sense it.

Charles continues. “We can’t be good unless we know what bad is, and it’s a shame we’re working against time,” he says. Jim asks Charles where the carnival came from. Charles tells him it probably started as one man, long ago, and he slowly collected all the others. “The stuff of nightmare is their plain bread,” he says. “They butter it with pain.” They exist only to hurt people, and that hurt “fuels” the carnival. The boys ask the older man how he knows all this. “My skeleton *knows*,” Charles says. “*It* tells me. I tell you.”

CHAPTER 40

So, Jim asks, does the carnival “buy souls?” No, Charles explains, they “get them for free.” “The carnival is like people, only more so,” he says. The rides and fun are “like a narcotic that makes existence worth the day,” so when young boys are eager to be men, and middle-aged men mourn the loss of time, the carnival offers an escape. “Is...is it...Death?” Jim asks.

“No,” Charles answers again. “But I think it uses Death as a threat.” According to Charles, death “doesn’t exist. It never did, it never will.” People believe it to be a thing or “entity,” but death is “nothing,” “a stopped watch.” That is the brilliance of the carnival, Charles explains. It “wisely knows we’re more afraid of Nothing than we are of Something,” so the carnival offers the **carousel**. But, Charles says, if you are “miserable” at one age, you will be “miserable” at another. “Changing size doesn’t change the brain,” he concludes. If Jim does ride the carousel, he will be a boy in a man’s body, and he won’t fit in his life. Then, Charles warns, the carnival will keep you in “bondage.”

Charles’s explanation further implies a connection between fall months and evil, and summer months and good. Charles claims that anyone can be an autumn person, which mirrors Bradbury’s argument that good and evil are choices. At any given time, anyone can become an “autumn person.”



Mr. Dark doesn’t hold all the cards because he can’t force Will and Jim to ride the carousel—they must choose to ride. Mr. Dark is afraid because he worries that they will reject his carnival and he will lose their souls.



Here, the carnival is described in terms of pure evil. Charles knows all this because of his life experience, which Jim and Will won’t have if they ride the carousel and instantly become older. In this way, Bradbury argues the importance of the slow, cumulative nature of aging and experience.



Mr. Dark gets his souls for free because they are willingly given up to him. However, Mr. Dark also sells the “narcotic” that soothes the souls before he ultimately claims them, which gives him an unfair advantage.



Again, death is the ultimate threat and fear because it represents the unknown. Instead of something tangible, death represents a great void, or merely “nothing.” Of course, Charles is afraid of Mr. Dark and the other freaks, but he is more afraid of death, and the carnival “wisely knows” this. Charles’s comparison to death as a “stopped watch” further reflects Bradbury association between clocks and life and mortality; when someone dies, their clock no longer ticks.



“Oh, poor Miss Foley,” Will cries. Charles agrees. “They’ve probably thrown her in with the freaks,” he suggests. As Will and Jim consider ways to destroy the carnival, including silver bullets and holy water, the door to the library opens. “Hide,” Charles orders the boys.

Charles’s warning that Jim will be “miserable” even if he does choose to ride the carousel is reflected in Miss Foley’s tragic fate. It is only Miss Foley’s body that is young; her mind is still fifty.



CHAPTER 41

Mr. Dark enters the library and formally introduces himself. “Where are the boys?” he asks. Charles doesn’t tell. “I could kill you,” Dark says, quietly. The Dust Witch is waiting outside, and she can stop Charles’s heart with her thoughts. “I hear your heart beating rapidly,” Dark says to Charles. “How old are you?” Dark asks.

Mr. Dark asks about Charles’s age because he knows that this is a sore spot for Charles—if Mr. Dark tempts Charles with the carousel too, he can own Charles’s soul as well.



Charles remains silent. Mr. Dark offers to make him young again if he tells him where Will and Jim are. He offers to make Charles forty, then thirty-five, if he points him in the right direction. “Stay there,” Mr. Dark says to Charles. “Listen to your heart. I’ll send someone to fix it.” Then, the strange man begins yell. “Boys...? Hear me...?”

Mr. Dark continues to taunt Charles’s age and tempt him with the carousel, only intending to kill him anyway. He means to send the Witch to “fix” Charles’s heart, which is to say stop it and kill him.



CHAPTER 42

As they hide, Will and Jim can hear Mr. Dark moving through the closed library. “Boys...?” the man calls again. As Mr. Dark looks in alcoves and pushes aside stacks of books, he continues talking. “Will? Willy? William. William Halloway. Where’s your mother tonight?” Dark asks. He says that Will’s mother has taken a ride on the **carousel** and is now two hundred years old. He continues searching and calling out to the boys. “Well,” says Mr. Dark as reaches to a high shelf and feels Will’s head. “Hello.”

Mr. Dark uses Will’s love for his mother against him. If he can convince Will that his mother has taken a ride on the carousel, then he may despair, come out of hiding, and willingly ride the carousel himself. At this point Mr. Dark also becomes a physical threat, adding to the mood of growing horror.



CHAPTER 43

As Mr. Dark grabs for Will, Will sees the tattoo of himself on the man’s palm. Then, Jim sees his own face as Mr. Dark grabs him with the other hand. “Dad!” yells Will. Charles runs into the room and punches Mr. Dark, and then the man grabs Charles’s left hand and begins to squeeze. Will and Jim can hear the bones in his hand snapping. “Damn you!” Charles yells.

Mr. Dark’s ability to so easily break Charles’s arm is a display of his physical power, which in addition to his supernatural power makes Mr. Dark an even more formidable force.



From a nearby window, Will can see his mother walking home from church along with Jim’s mother, and they both appear the appropriate age. Will yells down to them but they don’t hear, and he begins to cry. Mr. Dark drags Will and Jim out the front door, where they pass the Dust Witch outside. “The janitor’s **clock**,” Mr. Dark says to the Witch. “Stop it.”

Again, Bradbury makes a connection between clocks and life. While Charles’s wife’s “clock” is the source of her symbolic immortality, Charles’s “clock,” or heart, is the source of his mortality and vulnerability.



CHAPTER 44

Back inside the library, Charles's hand feels as if it has been placed in a "white-hot furnace." Suddenly, he hears the door open and close again. "Old man, old man, old man, old man," the Dust Witch calls. The Witch can hear his breathing and feel his pain, and he knows that it is no use to hide. "Damn you!" Charles yells. "Get it over with! I'm here!" As the witch approaches, he can feel his heart slow down and "stumble."

As the Witch moves in closer for the kill, Charles is struck by a strong and inexplicable desire to laugh. "Why?" he thinks. "Why am I...giggling...at such a time!?" Charles breaks out into uncontrollable laughter and the Witch "swoons back," as if in pain. "You!" he laughs. "Funny! You!" His laughter increases, and the Witch grabs at her face as if she has been burned. Suddenly, she turns and runs out of the library. "What's happened?" Charles thinks to himself in disbelief. He follows and runs out into the street.

It is no use for Charles to hide, because the Witch's supernatural powers and "special blindness" ensure that she will find him wherever he is. His heart slows and "stumbles" because the Witch has the power to stop his heart using only her mind. At this point the evil powers of the carnival seem unstoppable.



Charles begins to laugh for apparently no reason at all, as he himself is confused when the sound escapes his mouth. However, the happiness that his laughter implies is incompatible with the Dust Witch's very existence, and she responds as if it causes her physical pain. This reflects Bradbury's argument of the power of happiness and laughter to overcome evil.



CHAPTER 45

Outside, Will marches, part of the parade. He doesn't want to march, but his legs keep moving. He wants to scream but can't. He looks for Jim and finds him, and then his eyes fall on the Dwarf. Looking at all the freaks, Will wonders who they are, or were, before Mr. Dark found them.

Mr. Dark talks as they march. "You'll travel with us, Jim," he says. Mr. Dark isn't sure that Mr. Cooger will survive, and if he should die, he will make Jim his new partner. After all, Dark and Nightshade has a nice ring to it, he says. Mr. Dark promises to make Jim a man of twenty-two or twenty-five, but he plans to make Will a baby for the Dwarf to carry. That way Will won't be able to "talk and tell all the lovely things" he knows.

Will has seemingly been taken captive by the carnival, but even in his terror and despair he thinks of others and sympathizes with him.



Mr. Dark's plan to make Will younger and not older is precisely because of Will's innate goodness. Making Will a baby—a symbol of innocence and purity—is the only way to keep him from telling the truth. Jim, on the other hand, can apparently be better trusted to embrace evil and even help Mr. Dark run the carnival.



CHAPTER 46

Behind the parade the Dust Witch scurries to catch up, and behind her, Charles walks slowly with the "remembrance of age." Mr. Dark leads Will and Jim to the carnival grounds and brings them to the Wax Museum. "Sit," Mr. Dark orders. "Stay." Will and Jim sit amongst the wax renderings of "murdered" and "gunshot" men and women, and the carnival goers have no idea that the boys are not wax.

Just like Charles can't keep up with Will and Jim, he can't keep up—physically, at least—with the carnival. Will and Jim are sit so still in the museum as to be confused for wax statues—either a result of their extreme terror, Mr. Dark's supernatural power to paralyze them, or both.



“Ladies and gentlemen!” Mr. Dark yells. He tells the crowd that it is time for the last show of the night: “The Most Amazingly Dangerous, oftentimes Fatal—World Famous BULLET TRICK!” One of the freaks hands Mr. Dark a rifle. The Witch, he says, is the “death-defier, the bullet-catcher.” Mr. Dark calls for a volunteer from the audience and then discreetly turns to the Witch. “Is the **clock** stopped?” he asks.

“Not stopped,” the Witch replies. Mr. Dark stares in disbelief. The Witch begs him to stop the show and he refuses. He finds the tattoo of the Witch on the inside of his wrist and pinches it. The Witch clutches her chest. “Mercy!” she yells. Mr. Dark ignores her and again calls for a volunteer from the audience. He is met with silence and is about to cancel the show when Charles stands up. “Here,” Charles yells.

Again, Bradbury draws a parallel between life and mortality and clocks. When Mr. Dark asks the Witch if “the clocked stopped,” he is referring Charles’s heart and inquiring whether the Witch was successful in killing him.



The Witch’s plea to stop the show shows her own fear. She knows that Charles has the power to defeat them with happiness, and she does not want to die. Mr. Dark’s treatment of the Witch and his refusal to show her mercy suggests that, like Miss Foley and Mr. Fury, the Witch was once a carnival-goer who fell to temptation and is being held against her will.



CHAPTER 47

“Go get ‘em, Pop!” a man yells from the crowd as Charles makes his way to the stage. The Dust Witch begins to “tremble secretly,” and Mr. Dark offers Charles his hand to help him onto the platform. He politely declines. “But—” Mr. Dark says to Charles, “your left hand, sir, you can’t hold and fire a rifle.” Charles tells him he will manage with one hand. “Hoorah!” yells a boy from the crowd. Mr. Dark “snaps” the rifle and throws it to Charles, who catches it easily.

“I need a boy volunteer to help,” Charles says. Several hands shoot up in the crowd, but he wants Will. “Hold on. My son’s out there,” he says. “Will! Come on, boy!” Will hears his calls from the Wax Museum, and after several minutes, he begins to make his way to the stage. “Here’s my good left hand!” Charles says.

Mr. Dark hands Charles a bullet. “Mark it with your initials,” he says. Instead, Charles carves a “crescent moon” into the bullet. Mr. Dark takes the personalized bullet, and seeing nothing wrong with the strange shape, puts it in the chamber and throws the rifle back to Charles. Mr. Dark turns and walks toward the Witch, but he is stopped by the sound of Charles “cracking” the rifle.

When the man in the crowd refers to Charles as “Pop,” it is another reference to Charles’s advancing years, though at this point Charles seems to have moved past his simple fear of aging. Mr. Dark believes Charles to be helpless, but when Charles so easily catches the rifle, it suggests otherwise.



Charles’s reference to Will as his “good left hand” is evidence of the love that he feels for his son, which will later help Charles to destroy the Mirror Maze and bring down Mr. Dark. The love and confidence in Charles’s voice is able to free Will from the Wax Museum.



The “crescent moon” that Charles carves into the bullet is symbolic of his smile and happiness. Mr. Dark sees nothing wrong with this shape because he doesn’t make the connection. Mr. Dark is the epitome of evil, and as such, he doesn’t realize what the shape means.



Charles ejects the bullet. “Let’s cut our mark more clearly, eh, boy?” Charles says to Will as he carves another moon into the bullet. Charles knows that this new bullet is a replacement—Mr. Dark has the original, which he will discreetly hand to the Witch to slip into her mouth. The bullet in the chamber now is wax, and it will disintegrate once Charles fires. Then, the Witch will stand opposite him with the original bullet between her teeth. “Fanfare! Applause!”

Charles readies the rifle to fire and the crowd begins to laugh and clap. “Show the lady your teeth, Will!” Charles yells. Both father and son smile at the Witch, and as the crowd continues to laugh, Charles can see her tremble and fade. “*It is my own smile,*” he thinks. “*I have put my own smile on the bullet in the rifle.*” He waits a moment to give the Witch time to feel his thoughts, and then he fires.

Charles must carve his smile again because this new bullet must reflect his happiness as well for his plan to work. He sees through Mr. Dark’s tricks (which for once are entirely non-supernatural) and uses them against him. Still, Mr. Dark is unaware of the significance of the shape.



Charles thinks about the smile on the bullet because he knows that the Witch will be able to sense his plan. Charles hopes that this smile, along with their actual smiles and the laughter of the crowd, will be enough to combat the dark powers before them. Like Will does on the roof, Charles directly faces his fear of the Witch and is able to destroy her.



CHAPTER 48

The Dust Witch screams and falls from the platform. Charles instantly knows she is dead. “It’s all right!” Mr. Dark reassures the audience. “Show’s over! Just fainted!” In the commotion, Charles tells Will to jump from the platform, and they run to Jim. He is still in the Wax Museum, but Charles must first go through the Mirror Maze to get to him. “Dad, don’t go in!” Will warns, but Charles steps inside.

Inside the Mirror Maze, Charles can see the endless reflection of “one million sick-mouthed, frost-haired, white-tine-bearded men.” The man reflected in the mirrors is much too old, Charles thinks, and he is getting older the farther back the reflection goes. The “wild image repeats to insanity,” and as Charles puts up his hands to fend off the old man in the mirrors, the lights go out in the Mirror Maze.

Will doesn’t want Charles to enter the Mirror Maze because Charles’s image will be distorted in the mirrors and he will be reflected as a much older man. Knowing his father’s struggles with old age, he doesn’t want him to be tempted by the carousel as well.



Charles sees himself reflected as an old man because this cuts right to his own fears and insecurities—old age and mortality. Charles is clearly frightened and risks going mad, despite his previous confidence.



CHAPTER 49

Will stands behind Charles in the dark Mirror Maze and digs in his pockets. He produces a kitchen match and strikes it, bathing the maze in soft light. “No!” yells Charles, knocking the match from Will’s hand. “Dad, we gotta see!” Will yells, reaching for another match. As Will strikes his last match, Charles falls to his knees, his eyes “clenched” shut.

Charles doesn’t want Will to light the match because he doesn’t want to see his elderly reflection in the mirrors; however, without some light they will be unable to navigate their way through the maze. Charles again needs to face his fear directly.



“Oh, Dad,” Will cries. “I don’t care how old you are, ever! I don’t care what, I don’t care anything! Oh, Dad, I love you!” he weeps. Charles stands and looks at his reflection in the mirror and sees his son reflected behind him. A small whimper escapes Charles’s mouth, and then he opens his mouth wide and “lets the loudest sound of all free. The Witch, if she was alive, would know that sound, and die again.”

Will’s encouragement to his father is evidence of both his innate goodness and the deep love he has for Charles. Charles finds strength by ignoring his own reflection and focusing on Will instead—the object of his own deep love. With his scream, Charles rejects the evil of the maze and instead embraces the love of his son, as the book once more presents the power of positive, instinctual human actions, like laughter or a yell of adoration.



CHAPTER 50

Suddenly, all the mirrors in the Mirror Maze shatter simultaneously and fall to the ground, “all because of the sound” made by Charles. With his scream, Charles “accepts everything at last.” He “accepts the carnival,” and Will and Jim, and “above all else himself and all of life.” Will stands in a sea of broken glass. “Dad, what’d you do?” he asks.

Without accepting his age and inevitable death, Charles would be unable to make it successfully through the maze and wouldn’t be able to destroy Mr. Dark and save Jim. Without accepting the truth, Charles will never be happy.



CHAPTER 51

In the distance, Will can hear the music of the calliope, but he can’t tell if it is playing forward or backward. Running in the direction of the **carousel** Will stops. “Mr. Electrico!” he thinks. “Kill or cure!” Will looks to the surrounding tents and sees the Dwarf standing near the other freaks. Will asks Charles why the freaks don’t try to stop them. “Scared,” answers Charles. They watched the Witch die, and they worry that they will be next. Will can hear the music more clearly now. It had been playing backward, but now it is playing forward.

Presumably, Mr. Electrico is en route to the carousel to transform back into Mr. Cooger, but when the music begins to play forward, this suggests otherwise. Mr. Dark seems to know that Mr. Cooger is a lost cause and can’t be cured, so he plays the music forward instead to lure Jim (who is to replace Mr. Cooger) to the carousel. Once again, the freaks’ fear of Charles and his happiness works in Will and Charles’s favor.



A group of freaks appear carrying Mr. Electrico in the electric chair toward the **carousel**. Suddenly, the freaks “jump and scurry,” and drop the chair. Charles sneezes as a strong wind stirs up the dust around the tents. The chair sits on an angle, empty. “But,” says Will. “Where’s Mr. Electrico? I mean...Mr. Cooger!?” Charles looks down to the dust. “That must have been him?” he questions.

The dust that causes Charles to sneeze is what is left of Mr. Electrico. Instead of eternal life, the carousel has been Mr. Cooger’s undoing, and the forward motion of the carousel suggests that Mr. Dark never intended to cure him in the first place. He feels no loyalty to his entertainers, and easily casts them aside.



Jim appears between the fallen chair and the **carousel**. “Jim!” yells Will. Mr. Dark is nowhere to be found, but Will knows that he started the carousel to draw Jim in. As Will watches, Jim “walks slowly toward the free, free ride.” Charles tells Will to “go get him” and runs for the control box.

Jim walks willingly to the carousel with only the music to tempt him. Mr. Dark can’t force Jim—he must ride of his own accord. He seems supernaturally drawn in, but this is also a sign of the “darkness” in Jim’s nature—he cannot resist where Will can.



Jim reaches out for the brass poles of the moving **carousel**. He slaps his hand from pole to pole as the ride picks up speed, and then he firmly grasps one and pulls himself up on the carousel. “Jim, get off!” Will yells. “Jim, don’t leave me *here*!” Will runs next to the carousel, wildly screaming to Charles to shut it down. Jim’s eyes look blank. “Jim, please!” Will yells again as he jumps on the carousel next to him.

For a moment, both Will and Jim “ride the night.” After “traveling half a year,” Will rips Jim from the **carousel**, and both boys fall to the ground just as Charles shuts down the ride and the empty carousel slows. “Oh, God,” cries Will. “Is he dead?”

CHAPTER 52

As Charles and Will assess Jim, they hear someone cry for help in the distance. “Help! He’s after me!” a boy screams loudly. “That man with the tattoos!” the boy says. Will looks to Charles. “Mr. Dark!” he yells. Charles tells Will to stay with Jim and try to revive him. “Artificial respirations. All right, boy?” Will nods.

Charles runs to the young boy. “What’s your name?” he asks. “Jed,” the boy replies, still running. Charles asks the boy how old he is. “Nine!” the boy answers. “Only nine?” Charles asks. “I was *never* that young,” Charles asks the boy to roll up his sleeves, and when he refuses, Charles rips the shirt from his back. Jed’s torso is covered with scores of tattoos. “Why, Jed, that’s fine artwork, that is,” Charles says.

“You can’t hurt me!” Jed cries. Charles disagrees and pulls the boy near, “almost lovingly, close, very close.” Jed begins to scream, “Murder! Murder!” Charles swears he won’t kill him. “You’re going to murder yourself,” Charles says. Jed calls him “evil,” and Charles laughs. “So it must seem,” he says. “Good to evil seems evil. So I will do only good to you, Jed, I will simply hold you and watch you poison yourself.” He holds the boy tight, “like a father and son long apart, passionately met,” and Jed falls to the ground, dead.

CHAPTER 53

As Charles stands over Jed’s dead body, the freaks begin to come out of the tents. The tattoos on the boy’s body begin to “shift” and “shriveled” as “scores of freaks glance fearfully around.” Suddenly, the tattoos begin to vanish, and Jed appears as a “plain dead boy, unbruised by pictures,” staring up at Charles with the “empty eyes” of Mr. Dark.

If Jim rides the carousel and becomes older, he will effectively leave Will behind in childhood. Will would rather ride the carousel with Jim than stay a child alone, however—the strongest evidence possible of their friendship and Will’s love for Jim.



As Will and Jim “ride the night,” they both become six months older and also lose another degree of innocence. Just as Bradbury writes at the beginning of the novel, they will never be “so young” again.



Jim can’t be revived with medical care; he requires love and happiness to destroy the dark power of the carousel and save him.



When Will hears the carousel running backward after the collapse of the Mirror Maze, it isn’t to transform Mr. Electrico—Mr. Dark is riding to become the boy Jed, trick Charles, and lure him to his death.



Charles destroys Mr. Dark with only the love and goodness inside him—whereas his fatherly love saves Will, it destroys Mr. Dark, who is the opposite of love. Again, Charles must first face his fears before he can destroy Mr. Dark. In this way, Bradbury once more suggests that fear only has the power that one gives it. Once Charles faces his fears, he is able to overcome them.



Once again, riding the carousel does not change Mr. Dark’s soul—or his eyes. Mr. Dark’s tattoos disappear from his body, suggesting that the freaks are released from their bondage upon his death.



The freaks let loose a collective sigh, and “stampede” in every direction, free at last. The tents each fall to the ground, and the living Skeleton, the only remaining freak, lifts Jed from the ground and walks away. Charles looks to Will, still attempting to revive Jim. Jim is “cold as spaded earth.”

The freaks sigh and run off because they are finally free of Mr. Dark’s evil powers, but the books doesn’t say what will become of them next—their lives have been taken away entirely by one bad choice.



CHAPTER 54

“He’s *dead!*” Will screams and starts to cry. “Stop that!” Charles yells as he slaps Will’s face. “Mr. Dark and his sort, they *like* crying, my God they *love* tears! Jesus God, the more you bawl, the more they drink the salt off your chin,” he says. He orders Will to laugh. “I can’t,” Will says. You must, Charles says. “We can’t take them seriously, Will!”

Charles now recognizes the power of laughter and joy to defeat the carnival. Ironically, a typical carnival is meant to inspire laughter and happiness, but this perverse version thrives only on pain and fear.



Charles drags Will to his feet and rifles through his pockets. He finds a harmonica and blows it. “Sing!” he yells to Will. “What?” Will asks, confused. Charles tells Will that they must be “silly.” He continues. “I’ll be damned if death wears my sadness for glad rags. Don’t feed them one damn thing, Willy,” he says. “Loosen your bones!” Will refuses. “Nothing...funny...” he says. “Death’s funny, God damn it!” Charles screams, pulling Will up to dance. Suddenly, the silliness of it all strikes Will, and he begins to laugh and dance with his father.

Will begins to laugh and dance with Charles, representing his own acceptance of the realities of life and death. Charles claims earlier in the text that the carnival uses the fear of death to capture souls, and Charles refuses to give the carnival power over him when he denies his own fear. He isn’t forcefully trying to repress his emotions, but instead taking a different point of view that will rob the carnival of its strength. He is still allowed “sadness,” but he wants that sadness to be for himself, not fuel for an evil power.



As Will and Charles dance around Jim’s body, he begins to stir. They keep dancing and Jim begins to smile. He slowly reaches up to them, and without speaking, they pull him to his feet and he “comes down dancing.” The three of them dance and laugh, and finally, Jim speaks. “What happened?” he asks. “What *didn’t!*” Charles answers.

Again, Jim’s recovery is evidence of the power of happiness and laughter. He cannot be saved by simply reviving his heart or lungs; rather, it is his soul that needs to be revived.



“Dad,” Will asks, “will they ever come back.” Charles looks to the abandoned carnival. “No,” he answers. “And yes.” Charles says the carnival won’t be coming back, but “other people like them” will. “God knows what shape they’ll come in next,” he says, but they are already on their way. “What will they look like?” Will asks. “How will we know them?” Charles is quiet. “Why, maybe they’re already here,” he says. Will and Jim look around at the empty field.

Will and Jim look around to an empty field because they have the capacity for evil. This reflects Bradbury’s central argument that everyone, even a seemingly pure soul like Will, can reject good and embrace evil at any moment. The danger of evil is not gone simply because the carnival is destroyed—the potential for harm is present in each living soul.



Charles, Will, and Jim turn to leave, and as they do, they walk by the still and silent **carousel**. “Just three times around,” thinks Will. “Just four times around,” thinks Jim. “Just ten times around, back,” thinks Charles. It would be so simple, but Charles knows better. “Once you start,” thinks Charles, “you’d always come back. One more ride and more ride. And, after awhile, you’d offer rides to friends.” Soon, “you wind up owner of the **carousel**, keeper of the freaks.” It probably won’t run without the freaks, Charles tells the boys, but he takes a wrench and breaks the control box of the carousel anyway as all the **clocks** in town “obediently” strike midnight.

“Last one to the railroad semaphore at Green Crossing is an old lady!” Will and Jim yell as they run into the night. Charles “hesitates only for a moment.” He feels a familiar pain in his chest but decides to run anyway. Death isn’t important, he thinks; everything else is. Charles runs alongside the boys as they all laugh and “slap the semaphore signal base at the exact same instant.”

As the town clocks strike midnight, it serves as another reminder that each second is another opportunity to choose between good and evil. Charles, Will, and Jim are still tempted to ride the carousel and become their desired age, but they now know that to do so is to embrace evil. When Charles breaks the control box, he rejects evil emphatically, but only for a moment of conviction. The clock will continue to tick and provide more opportunities to stray.



As Charles runs with Will and Jim, he is truly happy. It is not enough for Charles to simply love his son; he must also accept his own age and mortality. He has finally “caught up” with the boys and saved both them and himself.





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