

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 begins with Will and Jim standing together, the fading twilight casting a mysterious atmosphere around them as they gaze at a peculiar leather bag abandoned on the ground. The bag seems strangely out of place, almost as though it were deliberately left behind for them to discover. Will, feeling an impulsive surge of curiosity, kicks it, producing a hollow sound that echoes unsettlingly in the otherwise still air. Jim, his curiosity piqued, crouches down and reaches into the bag, pulling out a long metal shaft, which is adorned with strange and fantastical symbols. These symbols—chimeras and Chinese dragons—are often associated with protection, especially from storms. The ironic thing is that the storm they had expected never arrived, leaving the boys to speculate on the significance of the item they had just uncovered. The more they examine the situation, the more questions arise—why had the lightning-rod salesman left behind this seemingly important object? What had happened to him, and why was it abandoned?

As the evening deepens, the boys become increasingly fixated on the mystery of the lightning-rod salesman. They wonder why he had left so abruptly, abandoning his worldly possessions behind. The atmosphere around them has shifted; the hustle and bustle of the carnival has quieted, and the sounds of the town settling in for the night now fill the air. People are returning to their homes, the honking of cars signaling the end of the evening's festivities. Boys ride bikes down the streets, chased by playful dogs, and the night feels eerily calm after the carnival's chaos. Jim ponders over the bag's significance, believing it might hold all the man's belongings, suggesting that something must have happened to make him leave everything behind. Jim's tone conveys a sense of urgency, as if he senses that whatever is in the bag is incredibly important, and they must uncover its mystery before it's too late. The boys are caught up in a whirlwind of curiosity and unease, the weight of the moment growing heavier

with each passing second. There is a quiet understanding between them—they must investigate further, driven by the need to uncover the truth.

As they linger over the bag and the mystery it holds, Will presses Jim for answers. He questions what could be so important that the salesman left behind everything, including the bag they now find themselves obsessed with. Jim, though deeply curious, suggests that only by searching the bag can they truly understand what it contains, hinting that the mystery might be linked to something much larger. Their shared sense of adventure grows stronger, and as they look around, they notice the stillness of the town around them. The carnival has faded into the background, its once-lively sounds now distant. They pass the Mirror Maze, where their reflections are endlessly multiplied, heightening the surreal quality of the moment. Will feels an intense wave of isolation, knowing that the other children are safe in their homes, unaware of the strange adventure unfolding around them. This realization spurs them forward, knowing that what they are about to discover holds far more weight than they can understand. The night feels vast and filled with potential, as if everything that happens from here on out will lead them to a pivotal moment. Their determination to uncover the secrets of the bag grows stronger, the gravity of the carnival's hold on them impossible to ignore. They know they are on the brink of uncovering something profound, and though fear nips at their heels, their curiosity pushes them further into the mystery. The boys are no longer just passive observers—they are now active participants in a strange and ominous journey that promises to reveal not only the carnival's secrets but their own hidden strengths. Each new step they take deepens their connection to this growing mystery, and there is no turning back now.