

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 begins with Charles Halloway standing in front of the saloon's double doors, a heavy weight of uncertainty and dread pressing upon him. The stillness of the night amplifies his feelings, as if something sinister is about to unfold. The air itself feels charged, possibly holding the remnants of past fires or the foreboding presence of an impending Ice Age that might change the world in unimaginable ways. These thoughts swirl in Charles's mind, each one darker and more troubling than the last. He wonders if Time, in its relentless march, is quietly draining away into an abyss, erasing everything—memories, purpose, and life itself. With every moment, the feeling of unease grows, and Charles's reluctance to step forward reflects his inner struggle between confronting the unknown and avoiding the unsettling feelings clawing at him from within.

His attention is drawn to a figure across the street—a man in a dark suit, his movements slow and deliberate as he rolls up paper while carrying a brush and bucket. The man is whistling a haunting, almost melancholic tune that drifts across the street to where Charles stands, his unease deepening as the sound grows clearer. The song, a Christmas carol, feels out of place in the October night, evoking an overwhelming sense of sadness in Charles's heart. The familiar lyrics of "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" resonate in his chest, but rather than evoking the warmth of the holiday, they stir memories of innocence lost and a world weighed down by suffering. The song's soft, sorrowful tone seems to mock the joy it should inspire, and Charles is filled with an emotional turmoil that mirrors the sadness in the music. The clash between the traditional cheer of the carol and the cold, unforgiving atmosphere of the night adds to his growing disquiet.

The haunting carol continues to echo in his mind as Charles steps cautiously into the night. Drawn by an inexplicable force, he crosses the street toward the man, whose

back is turned as he pastes a poster on the inside of an empty shop. The strange figure, with his sharp, discerning gaze, turns to face Charles. There is something unsettling about his presence—an unspoken familiarity that sends a chill down Charles's spine. The man extends a hand toward him, and Charles notices the strange detail—the fine black hair covering the palm of his hand. A shiver runs through Charles as the man waves his hand, an almost dismissive gesture before he slips around the corner and disappears into the shadows. The air seems to grow colder, and Charles, left standing in the street, feels an overwhelming sense of discomfort, unsure of what just transpired.



Summaryer

Inside the shop, the atmosphere is even more bizarre. Two sawhorses stand beneath a single spotlight, supporting a massive block of ice, its shimmering green-blue tint almost otherworldly. The block of ice captures Charles's attention immediately, and he is drawn to it, as if some invisible force is pulling him closer. A placard beside the ice proudly announces "Cooger Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show," teasing fantastical and mysterious attractions, including "THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD." The words stir a deep sense of nostalgia within Charles, reminding him of his youth when such grandiose illusions were a part of the wonder and magic that filled his memories. As a boy, he had been mesmerized by magicians who displayed such wonders, and this was no different, except for the unease it now generated within him. The sense of wonder, once filled with excitement, now felt tainted with uncertainty.

Charles continues to stare at the ice, and the longer he looks, the more he realizes that it is not entirely empty. Within the ice, there is a distinct shape, a form that seems to emerge as if the ice itself is holding something—shaped like the figure of a woman. This shape, frozen and seemingly preserved, exudes a sense of mystery and allure, as though the very ice is holding back something powerful and otherworldly. The cold, hard exterior of the ice contrasts sharply with the warmth that Charles begins to feel radiating from within, almost as if the ice itself is alive. This paradox—a frozen object exuding warmth—draws him closer, his body almost involuntarily stepping forward. Despite the chill in the air, the warmth from within the ice seems to call to him, an invitation to discover what lies hidden beneath its surface. The woman's form inside,

seemingly trapped in a frozen world, beckons with a strange brilliance, casting an eerie light in the night. The vision is both unsettling and captivating, leaving Charles transfixed by its beauty and mystery. Each moment spent staring at the ice deepens his sense of fascination, even as a part of him recoils from the strange brilliance of the frozen figure before him.

