

In this gripping chapter, Charles Halloway faces a tense moment at a carnival, surrounded by a crowd that oscillates between anticipation and fear. As he stands on the platform, the cacophony of cheers fades away, and he feels an overwhelming weight of responsibility. The atmosphere intensifies as he glances at the Mirror Maze, an ominous place representing a descent into chaos, filled with reflections that hint at a deeper terror involving two boys, Will and Jim, who are trapped within. Despite his apprehension, he steels himself and engages with the audience, encouraged by their support.

Mr. Dark and the Witch loom as significant threats from the platform. Mr. Dark, ever charismatic, expresses skepticism about Charles's ability to perform a dangerous rifle trick with only one functioning hand. Nevertheless, Charles asserts his determination, managing to catch a rifle tossed by Mr. Dark, much to the crowd's delight. This moment boosts his confidence, and he calls for a volunteer — his son, Will. However, as he calls out to him, he receives no response, and tension mounts when Will remains still in the Wax Museum, seemingly entranced.

As Charles continues to urge Will to join him, the crowd joins in, calling for him, heightening the suspense. Finally, Will appears at the entrance of the Maze, almost like a puppet responding to an unseen force. Once on stage, father and son prepare for what is dubbed the "Bullet Trick," a daring spectacle filled with underlying danger. Mr. Dark, observing closely, begins to lose his composure amid the crowd's growing amusement.

Despite Charles's heavy reliance on Will, the rifle's weight shifts as he reassures his son, encouraging him through laughter and camaraderie. The atmosphere takes a darker turn as Charles contemplates the implications of their trick and the reality of a wax bullet, which should dissolve harmlessly but conceals the tension of their predicament. Desperate to convey his determination, he sends a silent message to the Witch, rooted in a sense of confrontation.

The chapter crescendos with the anticipation of the shot, leaving readers entranced by the interplay of terror and familial bonds as Charles resolves not just to pull the trigger but to do so with intent, reinforcing the theme of empowerment against dark forces. This impending climax builds a potent blend of fear and hope.