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Dramatic Publishing

A carousel with a white horse in the foreground and a cityscape on the canopy.

Ray Bradbury's

Something Wicked This Way Comes

**“Shades of Mark Twain,
but also a touch of
Stephen King. It is as if
Huckleberry Finn and
Tom Sawyer had found
themselves lost in a
sinister fairground full of
supernatural characters.”**

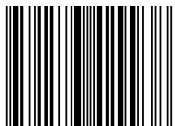
—Daily Telegraph

“Perfectly pitched for audiences of 9 years old and upwards. The combination of humor and mild horror is excellent.”—*Sunday Herald*

Something Wicked This Way Comes

Drama. By **Ray Bradbury**. **Cast:** 6 to 9m., 2 to 5w. One strange and dark year long ago, Halloween came early. It came on Oct. 24, three hours after midnight, to be precise. The exact same time that *Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow* show rolled into Green Town, Ill. As the town clock chimes 3:00, James Nightshade and William Halloway leave their beds to watch the train pull in, but there is no one manning the locomotive and no one in the cars behind. Yet the siren song of a calliope beckons all with impossible dreams and youth regained. First lured by its promises, the two boys will soon discover the diabolical truth about the carnival. Behind the Egyptian mirror mazes and the spooky cast of characters, including the Illustrated Man and deadly Mr. Dark, the cost of wishes can be the stuff of nightmares. Only Jim, Will and Will's father can save the town from the sinister carnival that threatens to destroy it and them. Adapting his own literary classic for the stage, Ray Bradbury weaves a classic tale of good and evil, perfectly capturing the wonder of youth and Octobers of skies orange and ash gray at twilight. For those who still dream and remember, the show is about to begin. **Flexible set. Approximate running time 2 hours. Code: S2B.**

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Something Wicked This Way Comes

A play in two acts by
RAY BRADBURY



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(SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES)

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Something Wicked This Way Comes

CHARACTERS

Voice of Ray Bradbury

Lightning Rod Salesman

Will Halloway

Jim Nightshade

Mr. Halloway

Mr. Tetley

Crosetti

Mr. Dark

Miss Foley

Mrs. Halloway

Jim's Mom

Ice Woman

Cooger/Electrico

Robert/Young Cooger

Policeman

Girl

Dust Witch

Something Wicked This Way Comes

ACT I

AT RISE: *As the lights come up, BRADBURY'S VOICE speaks.*

BRADBURY'S VOICE. First of all, it was October, a rare month for boys. Not that all months aren't rare. But there be bad and good, as the pirates say. Take September, a bad month: school begins. Consider August, a good month: school hasn't begun yet. But you take October, now, and everything smokey-smelling and the sky orange and ash gray at twilight, and it seems Halloween will never come. But one strange and wild dark year, Halloween came *early*. At that time, James Nightshade was 13 years, 11 months, 23 days old. Next door, William Halloway was 13 years, 11 months and 24 days old. Both touched toward 14; it almost *trembled* in their hands. And that was the October week when they grew up overnight and were never so young any more ...

(During the above, WILL and JIM have appeared L and R and back into each other, collide, tussle and settle down on the lawn in front of the HALLOWAY and NIGHTSHADE houses and get busy whittling. We hear the LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN shake his bag of rods in the shadows.)

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN *(steps forward)*. Howdy, boys! Folks home?

(WILL and JIM shake their heads.)

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN *(cont'd)*. Got any money yourselves?

(They shake their heads.)

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN *(cont'd)*. Well—boy, what's your name?

WILL. Will, William Halloway.

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN. You?

JIM. Jim Nightshade.

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN. Nightshade. Now that's a name.

WILL. Yeah! I was born one minute *before* midnight, October 30th. Jim was born one minute *after* midnight, which makes it October 31st!

JIM *(proudly)*. Halloween.

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN. Halloway. Nightshade. Got no money? Here! It's free! *(He yanks out a lightning rod and shoves it at them.)* Why? One of those houses will be struck by lightning! Without this rod, bang! Fire and ash, roast pork and cinders! Grab!

(LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN tosses the rod. WILL catches it and hands it to JIM.)

WILL. Boy, it's heavy! And funny-looking. Never seen a lightning rod like this!

JIM *(stares)*. Heck! *That's* Egyptian. Scarab beetle.

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN. Damn me eyes, sure!

JIM *(points)*. And those—Phoenician hen tracks.

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN. Right!

JIM. How come?!

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN. Why the Egyptian, Arabic, Abyssinian, Choctaw? Well, what tongue does the wind talk? What nationality is a storm? What country do rains come from? Where does thunder go when it dies?

Boys, you got to prepare in every dialect to hex the balls of blue fire that prowl the earth like sizzling cats. I got the only lightning rods in the world that can kill any storm, crack the lightning!

WILL. Which, which house will it strike?

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN. Hold *on*. Lemme *see*! (*He stares into their faces.*) Some folks suck lightning, like cats suck babies' breath. The two of you now ... One of your attics is a dry river bottom, itching to let lightning pour through! Tonight! Tom Fury tells you! Fury, ain't that a fine name for one who sells lightning rods? Boys, you're in *dire* need! Climb that roof, nail this rod high!

WILL. But which house, which!?

(LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN feels the air to left, then the right, eyes shut. He pulls back as if shocked!)

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN. Yeah! Jim Nightshade, this *your* place?

JIM (*proudly*). Mine.

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN (*stares into JIM's face*). Had to be!

WILL (*left out*). What about *me*?

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN. Sorry, boy, the *real* fire's here, at the Nightshade's! So! Storm's coming. Don't wait, Jim, or ... Bamm! That fire'll sizzle down the sky, blow you like a penny whistle, suck your soul back up to Jesus! Nail it high or you're dead come dawn! (*He shoves the rod in JIM's hands as if blessing it.*) My God, the storm, the fire! Feel it, way off. Here it comes! Jump!

(And the LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN vanishes in swift rains of falling leaves!)

WILL. Jim, don't *stand* there! Your *house*! You going to nail up that rod or *not*?!

JIM. Why spoil the fun?

WILL. Fun! Think of your *mom*! You want her *burnt*?

(Lightning strikes. Thunder! Stunned, they jump and run. Blackout! We hear hammering, clanging, and a pinspot picks up JIM and WILL, hammers in hand, looking up.)

JIM. There!

WILL. Yeah!

(More lightning. Thunder. JIM and WILL, panicked, run. Blackout. The lights come up to find MR. HALLOWAY surrounded by images of books as JIM and WILL run in.)

HALLOWAY. That you, Will? Grown an inch since breakfast. Jim? Eyes darker, cheeks paler: you burn yourself at both *ends*, Jim?

JIM *(ducks his head)*. Heck, Mr. Halloway.

HALLOWAY. No such place as heck. But hell's right here. See? *(Shows them a picture in a book.)* Hell never looked better. Here's souls sunk in hideous slime. *There's* someone wrongside up, inside out!

JIM *(staring)*. Boy *howdy*! What *else*?

HALLOWAY *(opens another book)*. *Pterodactyl. Kite of Destruction! Drums of Doom: The Sage of the Thunder Lizards!* Pep you up, Jim?

JIM. I'm pepped!

HALLOWAY. Will, you need a white-hat or *black-hat* book?

WILL. Hats?

HALLOWAY. Jim here wears a black 10-gallon Stetson, reads books to fit. Fu-Manchu now, and soon? Machiavel-li! Or Dr. Faustus—extra large black Stetson! And a white hat for Will, *right*, son?

WILL. Sure! Just gimme *The Mysterious Island*.

JIM. What kinda hat would *you* wear, Mr. Halloway? Black or white?

HALLOWAY. Both! Can that *be*? Both! Will, tell Mom I'll be home in an hour! Get, both of you! And take your dinosaurs and mysterious islands with!

(Lightning! Thunder! JIM and WILL run off. HALLOWAY stares after them, philosophising.)

HALLOWAY *(cont'd)*. Lord, see them run. Oh, I'd love to run with them, make the pack. I know what the wind does to them, taking them to all the secret places that will never be secret again! You got to run nights like this or the sadness hurts. Well! Come on, old man.

(HALLOWAY steps from library illumination and projections of books into a second pool of light as MR. TETLEY wheels his wooden Indian into place. Running in, JIM and WILL jolt to a halt!)

TETLEY. Hey! Scare you, boys?

WILL. Naw, Mr. Tetley, how's the United Cigar Store business?

TETLEY. Well, me and my wooden Indian here, we—

(Thunder. A faint drift of calliope music. TETLEY freezes.)

WILL & JIM. Mr. Tetley? Mr. Tetley?

(WILL and JIM back off and end up near CROSETTI and his barber pole, which spins slowly in the dark. He is also frozen, listening, a tear drop running down his cheek, which he wipes away.)

CROSETTI. Crosetti, you fool! *Something* happens, *nothing* happens, you cry like a baby! *Smell!*

(JIM and WILL sniff.)

JIM. Licorice!

WILL. Heck, no. Cotton candy!

CROSETTI. I haven't smelled that in years. Time, time. Where does that smell come from? There's no place in town sells cotton candy. Only circuses.

(CROSETTI freezes.)

JIM. Mr. Crosetti? Mr. ... ?

(They give up and run on. JIM stops and looks up.)

JIM *(cont'd)*. Wait, Will!

WILL *(looks up)*. No, sir! *(Looks away.)*

JIM. Will! It's *there*!

WILL. C'mon, *damn* it!

JIM *(resists)*. Know what you are? A damn old dimwit Episcopal Baptist priest! Here's my special tree! *(He leaps up and starts climbing.)*

WILL. Jim, get down!

JIM. Not till I *see*. C'mon!

WILL *(angrily)*. No, sir!

JIM. Hey! Boy!

(JIM has reached the top and peers off toward the outline of a window with lights and shadows moving within. We hear faint jazz music.)

WILL. Jim, come down from there!

JIM. Hey! Gosh amighty. You ought to see *this*.

WILL. I don't *wanna*!

(JIM stares. The music is louder. The shadows move.)

JIM. Oh, no. *(Gasps.) Yeah!* Sure. Yeah!

WILL. Jim, I'm gonna go tell your mom!

JIM *(looks down, irritated)*. You wouldn't!

WILL. Gonna get an axe, chop that damn tree down! Jim!

JIM *(stares off)*. Just one more peek! Boy. OK, OK. *(Relents.)*
Here I come!

(JIM clammers down and jumps off the tree. WILL is turned away, eyes shut.)

JIM *(cont'd)*. Gosh, Will, lemme tell you.

WILL. Shut up!

JIM. Up there, they—

WILL. Don't want to *hear!*

JIM. *Someday* you will!

WILL. No, sir, never, never!

JIM. *Someday*, I'll just climb that old tree ... and *never* come down! Will, up there is a ... education!

WILL. Then burn down the school! Git!

(WILL rushes off. JIM pursues into the night. Then we hear, far off, drawing near, someone singing. Enter, masked, and not yet recognizable, MR. DARK, tossing handbills to the wind, on which calliope music whispers.)

DARK *(sings)*.

I HEARD THE BELLS ON CHRISTMAS DAY
THEIR OLD, FAMILIAR CAROLS PLAY,
AND WILD AND SWEET
THEIR WORDS REPEAT
OF PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO MEN!

(HALLOWAY moves out of the night, near a shop window where a long ice block rests on two sawhorses, inside which

an illumination, a “ghost” of a lovely woman can be seen. HALLOWAY trembles his hand toward the image in the ice as DARK, quietly amused, speaks.)

DARK. One of our many attractions. The most beautiful woman in the world.

(HALLOWAY stares at the block of ice. DARK tosses more handbills to the wind. The town people step from the shadows to hold and read them.)

LIGHTNING ROD SALESMAN *(reading)*. “Coming October 24th!”

TETLEY *(reading)*. “Cooger and Dark’s Pandemonium Shadow Show! A thousand and one wonders!”

MISS FOLEY *(reading)*. “Saint Anthony’s Temple of Temptation!”

CROSETTI *(reading)*. “The most beautiful woman in the world!”

(JIM and WILL step from the shadows to catch the handbills.)

JIM *(reading)*. “The Illustrated Man!” Hey!

WILL. Just an old guy with *tattoos*.

JIM. No! *Illustrated!* Look! A skinful of monsters! A menagerie!

TETLEY *(reads)*. “See Mr. Electrico!

FOLEY *(reads)*. “Egyptian Mirror Maze! See yourself ten thousand times *reflected*.”

JIM *(reads)*. “SEE! THE SKELETON MAN! Not thin, no, but SKELETON! SEE! THE DUST WITCH!”

WILL. What’s a dirty old *Dust Witch!*?

JIM. A witch *born* in the dust, *raised* in the dust, and comes back from the dust! Yah!

HALLOWAY *(exits, murmuring)*. The most beautiful woman in the world ... ?

(As HALLOWAY leaves, the ICE WOMAN, locked in ice, vanishes.)

WILL. Can't be. A *carnival* woman. Beautiful?!

JIM. Why not? It—

WILL *(stops him)*. It's not true. Carnivals don't come this late in the year. Anyway, who'd go to it?

JIM. Me! *(He stares off in the dark and takes a step.)*

WILL. Where you going?

JIM. I ...

WILL. Not back to that tree, that window, *never!*

JIM *(reluctantly)*. Not for a month. A *year!* I swear! *(Spits in his palm.)* Blood brothers?

WILL *(takes JIM's hand)*. Blood brothers!

(Distant thunder. WILL looks at the sky.)

WILL *(cont'd)*. Hey, the storm! You nail that lightning rod up there *good!?*

JIM. Yes and no.

WILL. Yes and *no?* Good grief!

(Lightning. Loud thunder.)

JIM. Night. *(Exits.)*

WILL. Holy cow! *Night!*

(WILL spins about in flickers of light and stands in his parlor with his parents.)

HALLOWAY *(reading a handbill)*. Hello, Will. Beat you home. *(Crumples the handbill.)*

WILL. Lookit, Ma!

(WILL hands the library books to MRS. HALLOWAY.)

MRS. HALLOWAY. Oh, these are *fine*, Willy!

WILL. Boy, the wind really *flew* us home. Streets full of *paper* blowing. Crazy handbills. You *see* any, Dad?

HALLOWAY. Stone lion blew off the library steps. Prowling the town, looking for tasty Christian boys no doubt. Crazy handbills? Naw. (*He stuffs the crumpled bill in his coat.*)

MRS. HALLOWAY. Upstairs, Will. Homework. Bed!

(*WILL moves off in shadow. Crossfade to JIM's room.*)

JIM'S MOM. Jim? You awake?

JIM (*in bed*). Wide open awake.

JIM'S MOM (*touching his hands*). Your hands are *ice*! You shouldn't have the window so high. Mind your health.

JIM. Sure.

JIM'S MOM. Don't say "sure" that way. You don't know until you've had three children and lost all but one.

JIM. Never going to have kids.

JIM'S MOM. You just *say* that.

JIM. I *know* it.

JIM'S MOM. *What* do you know?

JIM. No use making more people. People die. People die.

JIM'S MOM. *You're* here, Jim. If you weren't, I'd have quit long ago.

JIM. Mom. (*Pause.*) Remember Dad's face? Do I *look* like him?

JIM'S MOM. The day you go away is the day he leaves forever.

JIM. Who's going away?

JIM'S MOM. Why, just lying there, Jim, you run so fast. I never saw anyone move so much asleep. Promise, Jim, if you run, come back, with lots of kids to go wild. Let me spoil them. Some day.

JIM. No, I'll run. But bring back nothing.