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The Night Circus: A Novel

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Morgenstern, Erin. *The Night Circus: A Novel*. New York: Doubleday, 2011.
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“People see what they wish to see. And in most cases, what they are told that they see.” – page 28

The circus arrives without warning, appearing overnight, just outside of town. Within the intricate wrought-iron fence surrounding the circus no splash of color can be seen: a variety of tents in various sizes are striped only in black and white, the ground around them powdered in black and white swirls. Even from the outside, it is obvious that this circus – the Night Circus, or Le Cirque des Rêves, for the gate opens at sundown – is different. And once the gate does open visitors are met with the traditional acts of acrobatics and fortune telling, showcased alongside strange and unique wonders such as a never-melting ice garden, a wishing tree, and a maze of clouds. At dawn, the circus closes; after a time, it disappears as quickly as it came.

As children, Celia and Marco are bound to the Night Circus by their instructors. For Celia, raised and trained by her father, Prospero the Enchanter, this means she is eventually hired as a circus performer. For Marco, plucked from an orphanage at a young age and trained by a strange man named Alexander, this means working as an aide to the circus’ proprietor. But the circus is more than a job, it is the venue of a challenge – both trained illusionists, Celia and Marco are each expected to outperform the other in feats of magical ability, until such time as only one remains. However, as the years pass and the Night Circus travels the globe, Celia and Marco begin to think of the circus as a collaboration rather than a competition – they pour their love for each other into the circus, transforming it as well as the game to which they are bound.

Erin Morgenstern’s singular story of the Night Circus is told in three different narrative lines, which loop and regularly intertwine. The story begins as if the reader were attending the circus, experiencing its wonders firsthand. After an introduction, the story travels back to events that took place long before the circus was imagined: a magical wager, snippets of Celia’s training, and Marco’s solitary life. Finally, the story skips ahead, introducing Bailey Clarke, a Massachusetts boy yearning for something more than the farm on which he was raised. The rich prose used throughout each of the story’s three threads is sprinkled with alliteration and descriptive detail, ultimately pulling the different narratives together to form a cohesive and magical whole, much like the acts in the circus at the heart of the tale.