

Chaper 32

On the morning of December thirtieth, Maniac Magee woke up to an unusual silence and cold; the space heater was off, and Grayson, who usually prepared breakfast, was still under the covers. Concerned, Maniac shook Grayson and discovered his hand was cold. Realizing what had happened, he did not rush for help but instead spoke to the old man about their shared journeys and read aloud from the books Grayson had loved, finishing with Grayson's favorite, *Mike Mulligan's Steam Shovel.* As evening fell, Maniac lay beside Grayson's mat and cried.

Three days later, the funeral took place on New Year's Day. Maniac had eventually confided in the zookeeper about Grayson's death, remaining mostly out of sight thereafter. Grayson arrived at the cemetery in a simple wooden box, carried by pallbearers from the town's trash-collecting corps, who smelled faintly of pine and spoiled fruit. Maniac stood alone as the only mourner, hoping for others—maybe the park Superintendent or summer food stand attendant—but none came. The only company were funeral home staff and pallbearers, with two men off to the side casually smoking.

A pallbearer's impatience broke Maniac's reflective thoughts, prompting questions about the arrival of the minister. As time passed with no sign of this official, frustrations grew among the pallbearers. Discussion turned to lighter subjects like doughnuts and hot coffee, contrasting sharply with the solemn occasion. Amid the mutterings and clanks from nearby gravediggers, if the minister did not arrive soon, the pallbearers indicated they would leave.

Feeling overwhelmed and disconnected from the events surrounding Grayson, Maniac decided he could not bear to wait any longer. He didn't want to witness the conclusion of the sad affair, so he took off running, fading into the distance as the calls of the pallbearers echoed behind him.