

Chapter 17

On a sweltering August day, Maniac Magee and his friends gathered at the lively intersection of Chestnut and Green, transformed into a bustling block party and makeshift swimming pool. The heat was so intense that people sought relief in the gushing water from a fire hydrant, which some kids joyfully danced around. Amid the merriment—filled with laughter, radios playing, and the scent of sweet lemonade—Maniac reveled in the fun, soaking up the joy around him. However, amid the chaos, he heard a singular voice calling out to him repeatedly, which cut through the frenzy and drew his attention.

He turned to find a man pointing a brown finger at him, having identified him as "Whitey." Maniac, surprised to hear this label used on him, simply blinked back at the man, still surrounded by the water's cooling spray. The man insisted that it was time for Maniac to leave, asserting that he should go home, as he did not belong in that space. Despite Maniac's protests, claiming he was right there on Sycamore and this was indeed his home, the older man remained unyielding. The man theorized that Maniac was improperly encroaching upon a space that he believed wasn't for him and acted as if he had a right to expel him.

As tensions rose, local children, Hester and Lester, jumped to Maniac's defense, confronting the man known as "Old Ragpicker." In the ensuing commotion, the man ranted about segregation and belonging, declaring stark differences between blacks and whites. His voice transformed from targeting Maniac directly to addressing the surrounding crowd. At the end of this ordeal, a woman intervened, pulling the agitated man away. With the uproar silently settling, Maniac, who typically loved his sleep, found himself restless that night and the subsequent nights, prompting him to rise earlier to run around town, where his strains of thoughts were filled with confusion about the day's events.

As he continued to run through town, Hester and Lester excitedly invited him to join them for a run. Simultaneously, Amanda approached, eager to take him to the store, but Maniac sensed something was off. When he noticed his surroundings, he saw Mrs. Beale outside scrubbing away at the wall, frantically cleaning an oddly written message that starkly proclaimed, "ISHBELLY GO HOME." The implications of this message weighed heavily on Maniac as he processed the unfolding complexities of belonging and community.