Chapter 3

In the chapter, we meet Amanda Beale, a girl preparing for school with a suitcase full of books. She catches the attention of Jeffrey Magee, known as Maniac, because he mistakenly assumes she's running away like he is. Intrigued by her suitcase, Maniac greets her with a casual "Hi," which puts Amanda on alert, questioning his presence in the predominantly black East End where she lives.

Despite her initial suspicion, Amanda responds with a friendly "Hi" and explains that she is not running away—she is on her way to school. Amused by his misconception, she laughs so hard that she has to sit on her suitcase. Amanda then reveals the contents of her suitcase: it is packed with a multitude of books—fiction, nonfiction, encyclopedias—gleaming with the pride of a young bibliophile.

As school bells begin to ring, Amanda prepares to leave, but not before Jeffrey offers to carry her suitcase. She, however, pulls it back suspiciously and digs deeper into his identity. Their conversation reveals the racial divide of the town, as Amanda deduces that Jeffrey cannot be from the East End. He admits he is from Bridgeport but seems confused about his current whereabouts, leading Amanda to suggest he should clarify where he belongs.

Their exchange continues, with Amanda explaining why she hauls her entire library: her younger siblings' habit of scribbling on any paper available and a destructive dog named Bow Wow. Both kids sprint towards school, and Jeffrey, eager to read, asks if he can borrow a book. Amanda refuses but reluctantly considers lending him one under the condition he returns it, revealing her home address, albeit with emphasis on the boundary between their worlds.

As she rushes away for school, Amanda hastily tosses a book—The Children's Crusade—at Jeffrey before entering class, causing him to finally grasp the significance of her dedication to reading. That day marks a pivotal moment where their paths cross, highlighting not only their personal differences but their growing connection through literature.