

# Chapter 33

In January, the month was bitterly cold, devoid of snow, and characterized by frozen hardness and ice. Maniac Magee wandered, lost in his memories, surviving only through the necessity of eating and staying warm. He could not remain at the band shell, frequently returning to collect a few essentials—his blanket, nonperishable food, the glove, and as many books as he could fit into an old black satchel that once belonged to Grayson. Before leaving, he hastily painted over the number 101 on the door, indicating the end of a chapter in his life.

His days were spent running, often at a slow pace, occasionally breaking into furious sprints as if trying to escape himself. His route meandered through surrounding areas—Bridgeport, Conshohocken, East Norriton, and others—while he avoided the nearby P & W trestle and the troubling memories of his parents' deaths. This avoidance soon led him to cease crossing the bridge altogether.

Maniac roamed freely, traversing roads, alleys, railroad tracks, fields, and cemeteries, creating a tangled web of movement that might have mirrored Cobble's Knot if viewed from above. By nightfall, he returned to Two Mills to retrieve his satchel and find shelter for the night, sometimes from a buffalo pen, or other times from abandoned cars or basements.

As his food supply dwindled, Maniac sought sustenance at the zoo or the Salvation Army's soup kitchen, and he worked odd jobs but refused to beg. One day, he found himself in Valley Forge, a place marked by its historic significance where the Continental Army endured a harsh winter. Surrounded by rolling hills and monuments, he felt an overwhelming ache that resonated with the harshness of his own experiences.

Resuming a semblance of comfort, he put himself up in one of the tiny log cabins at Valley Forge, its space akin to a doghouse, complete with dirt floors and no real door. He lay down, throwing away uneaten saltines to the birds, wrapping himself in the blanket, and succumbing to the pursuit of dreams filled with memories. As night fell, Maniac rested in a profound stillness, resolute in waiting for death, understanding it would not come quickly or easily, feeling he had earned this waiting.