

Chapter 44

In the early July mornings, Maniac Magee found himself on quiet streets, experiencing a peculiar sense of being followed. Initially dismissing it as echoes of his own footfalls, he soon confirmed that he wasn't alone. This realization took shape when he unexpectedly encountered Mars Bar Thompson during one of his runs. Their interactions were marked by silence and avoidance; they would bounce off each other and go their separate ways without any acknowledgment. Yet, these encounters gradually evolved into a routine of silent companionship. They would cross paths in alleys, share routes, and eventually find themselves jogging side by side, still without a word exchanged.

Day by day, their silent running partnership grew more synchronized. They moved in rhythm, mirroring each other's speed and direction, becoming two runners sharing the same path without ever actually connecting verbally or through eye contact. This unspoken bond continued, serving as a uniquely shared experience, where if one changed pace, the other instinctively followed.

As they jogged through various landscapes, Mars Bar would lead them along routes downtown, towards his father's workplace, while Maniac would explore the scenic county farmlands on other days. Their routes diverged when the working folk began their day, but there remained a consistency—each believed the other was simply going his own way.

Their shared routine took a sudden turn one morning while passing the Grand movie theater. Piper McNab appeared, frantic and disheveled, crying out for help. He led them to the trolley terminal where they discovered the source of his distress: Russell was stranded on a trolley trestle, terrified and unable to move. While Piper pleaded with Maniac to save Russell, Maniac's focus remained inexplicably distant, ultimately turning away without a word, leaving Piper in a state of desperation on the platform. This moment showcased the complexities of Maniac's character, contrasting moments of bravery with unexpected detachment, setting the stage for the unfolding drama.