

# Chapter 9

In this chapter of "Maniac Magee," John McNab, an accomplished young pitcher who has never struck out a kid, faces a challenge when he encounters a small, seemingly unremarkable boy, known as Maniac. To McNab, this is a blemish he can't accept, leading him to make a plan to deal with the "runt" in what he considers an equivalent way—by beating him up. Alongside his gang, the Cobras, who have instilled fear in the West End, McNab sets out to find Maniac, rumored to frequent the park and railroad tracks.

On a Saturday afternoon, they spot Maniac, who is running along the tracks with a book in hand. The Cobras are momentarily stunned by the sight, unsure of how to react. McNab, frustrated and eager for revenge, picks up stones to throw at him, shouting that they should confront him. Maniac, sensing danger, jumps off the rail and begins to run, seeking refuge.

In a frantic escape, Maniac chooses to stick with the tracks, recalling a memory of safety associated with a house where he had enjoyed spaghetti. He navigates through some difficult terrain, evading the Cobras, who are now throwing stones and attempting to catch him. As he races through the town, the fast-paced blur of faces and places surrounds him, amplifying the tension and urgency of his flight.

Remarkably, Maniac realizes the voices of his pursuers are fading as he outpaces them. It dawns on him that they've stopped, remaining on a street one block away, laughing rather than chasing. The Cobras are at Hector Street, which serves as a social boundary between the East and West Ends—marked by racial divisions. Their laughter reveals their assumption that Maniac, a white boy, would face grave consequences if he crossed into the East End, illustrating the deep social divides in their community. This chapter skillfully captures the tension between belonging and the fear of crossing boundaries in a racially divided town.