

Chapter 9

The chapter opens with John McNab, a skilled baseball player who prides himself on striking out every kid he faces, struggling to accept his failure against a small, unassuming boy. Determined to erase this blemish on his record, McNab and his gang, the Cobras, decide that beating the boy up would serve the same purpose. They set out to find him, eventually spotting him near the railroad tracks, where he is seen running effortlessly along the rail—a feat that leaves the Cobras stunned and disbelieving. McNab, fueled by anger, hurls stones at the boy, signaling the start of a chase.

Maniac Magee, the boy in question, quickly realizes the danger and flees, opting to stay on the tracks rather than risk open streets. As he runs, he considers seeking refuge at a familiar house on Rako Hill but doubts whether it would deter his pursuers. The Cobras close in, pelting him with stones as he navigates obstacles like the dump, a creek, and dense foliage. The chase becomes a frantic blur of movement, with Maniac weaving through the town, acutely aware of the faces watching him from windows—each a reminder of the stability and safety he lacks.

The pursuit takes a surprising turn when Maniac notices the Cobras' voices fading behind him. He stops to find them halted at Hector Street, the symbolic dividing line between the racially segregated East and West Ends. The Cobras laugh, confident that Maniac, a white boy, will face dire consequences in the predominantly Black East End. Their amusement stems from the unspoken rules of the town, where crossing racial boundaries, especially for kids, is fraught with danger and social taboo.

The chapter highlights the town's deep racial divisions and the unspoken codes governing where people can and cannot go. Maniac's fearless traversal of these boundaries contrasts sharply with the Cobras' belief that he will be met with hostility. The laughter of the Cobras underscores their assumption that Maniac's ignorance of

these boundaries will lead to his downfall, setting the stage for the broader themes of race, belonging, and defiance that permeate the story.