***Maniac Magee***

***Chapter 21***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Brief Summary:***

Chapter 21. There is quite a commotion around Cobble’s Corner in celebration of Maniac untying the knot. In the midst of the confetti and streamers, Maniac notices Amanda is visibly upset and runs away. Maniac picks up a piece of paper and notices the confetti is made out of Amanda’s prized volume A of her encyclopedias. He runs after Amanda and finds her at home sobbing and hovering over the cover of the mangled book. Maniac decides he can no longer allow Amanda or her family be hurt by him. He heads out the door and travels to the corner of Hector Street where he finds McNab and the Cobras waiting for him. Knowing the boys won’t cross the invisible line that separates the East and West End, Maniac travels North on Hector between the curbs that separate the neighborhoods. By this time, Mars and a group of his friends are also trailing Maniac on their side of the curb. This continues until Maniac walks straight out of town.

***Detailed Summary(9-21):***

John McNab is angry that Jeffery has outwitted him in the baseball game, so he sets out to beat him up and gain back his reputation. His gang, the Cobras, goes looking for Jeffery and finds him running on the train track, as rumored. As the Cobras start throwing stones at Jeffery, he runs and passes many houses with people's faces looking out at him through the windows. Suddenly, the voices stop - he has run all the way past Hector street and into East End, the white section of Two Mills.

Jeffery has been in East End before (when he went running and when he met Amanda Beale), but now that it is the weekend there are black kids everywhere. [Mars Bar Thompson](https://www.gradesaver.com/maniac-magee/study-guide/character-list#mars-bar-thompson) immediately takes issue with Jeffery; while confronting him, Mars Bar offers Jeffery a bite of his candy bar and Jeffery amiably accepts, biting right where Mars Bar's bite marks had been. Unable to crack Jeffery's composure by threatening him, Mars Bar takes Jeffery's book (the one he has borrowed from Amanda) and when Jeffery grabs it back, a page is ripped out. A lady sweeping her porch nearby makes Mars Bar give back the ripped page and he tells Jeffery he had "better get on" (37).

Jeffery searches for Sycamore street, where Amanda and the Beales live, but he runs into Mars Bar and his gang again on his way. Right when the group has Jeffery pushed up against a brick wall, Amanda Beale finds him, and, realizing the damage Mars Bar has done to her book, starts kicking the bully in his shoes. Then, Amanda takes him home to her house where he meets her mother and siblings, Hester and Lester.

It isn’t long before he is taken in by Amanda Beale’s family. Maniac finds that he loves being a part of Amanda’s family; participating in chores, playing with Amanda’s younger siblings, and even being disciplined by her mother. Maniac loves being a part of the Beale family, despite having a different skin color.

The Beales take Maniac to a Fourth of July block party where Jeffery muses on how the people of East End call themselves black even though there are so many different colors of people represented. "Hands Down" invites him to play football with the other kids and everyone seems to accept him, asking him curiously, "You that Maniac?" (53).

Unfortunately, others in the East End neighborhood do not feel the same. At first Maniac is blind to the subtle dislike offered by some, but eventually the dislike becomes more overt and unknown members of the East End community begin taking it out on the Beale family as well. One morning, Maniac wakens to find other people have written "FISHBELLY GO HOME" on the side of the house.

When she sees Jeffery untangling a local kid's yo-yo string, as he often does with their shoe laces, Amanda has an idea: Maniac could make everyone in East End like him by undoing "Cobble's Knot." Cobble's Knot is a knot hanging from the flagpole outside Cobble's Corner Grocery that Mr. Cobble has long used as a publicity stunt, promising that anyone who untangles it can have a free large pizza every week for a year. As Maniac takes his time figuring out the knot, a crowd of children and adults forms around him, and everyone goes wild when, around dinnertime, there is nothing left but a pile of string.

Though Maniac's grappling with Cobble's Knot seems to have brought people together, tensions over Jeffery's race are still present, and Amanda finds that her most prized book (Encyclopedia "A") has been destroyed by an unknown perpetrator. Sure that this is a result of his presence, Maniac decides it is time to leave and he finds himself back at the zoo.

***Detailed Analysis(9-21):***

As is typical of Jeffery throughout the story, the shock and satisfaction that the bullies demonstrate when he stumbles into East End is foiled by Jeffery's total lack of fear being in the black section of town. It is almost as if he is "color blind" - unable to see race or put race first in his impressions of people and places - which is positive in that he does not stereotype others but negative in that he may miss important information about how society believes he should act. In short, this quality helps him make friends with those who are accepting of him and and his quirks, but also puts him and the people who accept him in danger.

Another important moment supporting Jeffery's unusual "color blindness" is when Mars Bar offers Jeffery part of his candy bar. Jeffery gladly takes a bite of Mars Bar's Mars Bar, leading to general shock and the narrator's explanatory comment, "white kids just didn't put their mouths where black kids had had theirs, be it soda bottles, spoons, or candy bars" (34). White people at the time likely saw black people as quite different from themselves and even bad or dirty - this is why it is so shocking for the other kids to see Jeffery so casually place his mouth where Mars Bar's had been (not to mention that the bully was likely trying to test or scare Jeffery with his offer).

Jeffery's relationship with the Beales feels almost too good to be true, and we find that this may be the case when Amanda and Jeffery find Encyclopedia "A" lying in tatters. However, until then, Spinelli paints a lovely, imagery-laden picture of what a happy, caring family should look like (in contrast to the situation Jeffery was in before with his aunt and uncle). Jeffery seems almost ageless in the Beale house, getting along equally well with Amanda, Hester, Lester, and Mrs. Beale.

Cobble's Knot is an interesting symbol in the book because Jeffery's tackling of the immense problem is evidence of his perseverance and celebrated by the East End community. However, this event is juxtaposed with some individuals from East End still not wanting Jeffery in their community (shown through the destruction of the encyclopedia) and the difficulty of taking apart the knot is put into perspective by the even greater challenges Jeffery finds in seeking a home.

The final image of Part I shows strong imagery of the racial divide in Two Mills and how Jeffery feels trapped in the middle, walking down the center line of Hector street while ugly insults are thrown from white to black and black to white over his head. Spinelli also notes that Maniac does not run this time, but walks the entire way, a symbolic action as we have so often seen Maniac run away from his problems.

***Summary and Analysis Part by part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

Cobble’s Corner explodes into celebration. [Maniac](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/jeffrey-lionel-maniac-magee) accepts the certificate for a year’s worth of free pizzas. [Mr. Cobble](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters) grabs the coiled string, which turns out to be four and a half blocks long. Eventually, though, [Amanda](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/amanda-beale) grabs a piece of homemade confetti that’s flying through the air. Soon she’s running, grabbing pieces of confetti, and crying, “Oh no!” Maniac follows. At home, he finds her crying, clutching the battered remains of the encyclopedia A volume.

***Analysis Part 1:***

At first, it looks as if Maniac’s triumph will be exactly what Amanda hoped it would be—it endears Maniac to both sides of the Two Mills community and unites everyone in celebration. But the joy is short-lived, as something precious to Amanda has been maliciously destroyed.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Maniac](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/jeffrey-lionel-maniac-magee) decides he can no longer put the Beales in a position to get hurt like this. He starts walking. Eventually, he runs into [John McNab](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/giant-john-mcnab) and the Cobras, hissing threats at him. So he keeps walking down the middle of Hector, drivers yelling and honking at him. On one side of the street, black kids follow him; on the other side, white kids follow him. Both sides yell at him and at each other. In the middle, Maniac walks right out of town.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Maniac feels responsible for the Beales being targeted. His exodus from Two Mills is symbolic, as neither side—West End or East End—entirely seems to want Maniac to be theirs. There isn’t a place in the community for someone like him, and he again finds himself in search of a home.