***Maniac Magee***

***Chapter 32***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Brief Summary:***

Chapter 32. Maniac wakes up one morning to find Grayson is dead. The book chronologically skips to the January day of Grayson’s funeral. Subsequently, Maniac is the only mourner surrounded by a funeral home director and a few indifferent pallbearers. The group anxiously awaits the arrival of the minister, who is late. Maniac, overcome with grief, takes off running.

***Critical Study(ch28-32):***

After a ton of struggle and patience from both Jeffery and Grayson, Grayson finally reads his first full book, *The Little Engine That Could*. To this, Maniac says "A-*men*" (103), saying he learned in East End that you don't have to wait for a prayer to say that word in celebration. To further celebrate, Maniac and Grayson cook a festive meal of toasted corn muffin and apple juice after which Maniac invites Grayson to stay overnight in the baseball shed.

In November it starts to get colder. On Thanksgiving Day, Grayson and Jeffery go to the Two Mills football game and then back to the baseball shed for what Maniac calls "the best Thanksgiving dinner we ever had" (107), dining on roast chicken, gravy, cranberry sauce, applesauce, Spaghetti-Os, raisins, pumpkin pie, and butterscotch Krimpets. While saying grace, Maniac thanks God for "this warm house and for our own little family here and for Grayson learning to read" (108). Finally, after some polka dancing, Maniac takes some black paint and paints the numbers 101 on the door of the shed, pronouncing it "one oh one Band Shell Boulevard" (109).

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Grayson moves into the shed. The two decorate the small space with a wreath, strings of popcorn, evergreen branches, and even some real Christmas decorations - a porcelain Santa, a partridge in a pear tree, and a wooden reindeer big enough to ride. Not only did they dress a tree in their little abode, but they chose one outside and trimmed that one too with natural ornaments like pinecones and berries.

Early on Christmas morning, Maniac wakes Grayson quietly and, without turning on any lights, they go outside to visit their tree and the animals at the zoo. After wishing all the animals a happy holiday and paying special attention to the buffalo family - giving the baby buffalo a scarf as a present - Grayson and Jeffery return to the band shell just as others in town are waking up. Grayson and Jeffery now exchange their presents.

As Christmas presents, Jeffery gives Grayson gloves and a hat as normal presents, and one very special present - a book written about his life called *The Man Who Struck Out Willie Mays*. Grayson, in turn, gives Jeffery gloves, a box of butterscotch Krimpets, and a baseball, saving his special present for last - Grayson's very own baseball glove. Both the man and the boy are overjoyed with their presents and with their love for one another.

Chapter 31 ends incredibly abruptly. After the wonderful Christmas scene Spinelli has painted for the reader, he ends with this simple sentence: "Five days later the old man was dead" (114).

Chapter 32, the last chapter of Part II, simply steps the reader through Grayson's death and funeral. On the morning five days after Christmas, Jeffery wakes to find Grayson still in bed, which is unusual as he is usually up with hot drinks set on the table. Instead of running to get help, Jeffery sits holding Grayson's hand - "the cold, limp hand that had thrown the pitch that had struck out Willie Mays" - and talking and reading to him until sundown. Only after a full day with Grayson's body does Jeffery cry.

The funeral is held a few days later. Besides the pallbearers and the funeral director, Maniac is the only one who comes to see Grayson buried. Maniac listens to the pallbearers talk disrespectfully at the grave. Then, he starts to run.

In this section, again centered around the relationship between Jeffery and Grayson, Spinelli shows the reader that untraditional families can still be filled with joy. By focusing on Thanksgiving and Christmas and detailing the events and sights of those holidays with careful imagery, the reader comes to understand that these holidays may be the best ever experienced by both characters simply because of their being together and making a home out of their mutual love and respect.

After these enchantingly described holidays, there is an abrupt juxtaposition at the end of Chapter 31 with the final line, "Five days later the old man was dead" (114). This line is significant for many reasons. First of all, it comes at the end of a chapter in which Jeffery and Grayson let themselves be completely happy and trusting, even though Jeffery says earlier in Part II that he thinks he has bad luck with parents. Second, as names are quite important in this story, it is significant that the narrator calls Grayson simply "the old man" (114) in this sentence. Since the narrator continues calling Grayson "the old man" (116) throughout the next chapter, perhaps calling him this draws attention to the fact that, as Jeffery comes to realize at the funeral, Grayson's presence is gone as soon as he dies.

In a similar fashion, Spinelli uses circuitous, imagery-laden description to illustrate Jeffery holding Grayson's hand after he has died, writing, "the cold, limp hand that had thrown the pitch that had struck out Willie Mays, that had betrayed the old man's stoic ways by giving him a squeeze" (115-6). This description focuses on aspects of Grayson's life rather than the person himself, as people often do once someone has died, and the two memories contrast his fame and aspirations as a young man with the quiet comfort of friendship he experienced in old age.

At the funeral, Spinelli again draws attention to the symbolic action of running away from one's past and one's problems as Jeffery runs from the grave. Unlike when he walked away from East End, as if making a conscious choice of where he shouldn't be, this time his leaving seems forced, unintentional, and motivated by strong emotion.

Finally, this section again includes a symbolic book. Grayson's first completed book is *The Little Engine That Could*, a children's book about perseverance. The use of this book shows how hard Jeffery and Grayson had to work to allow Grayson this achievement at his age and after nobody else believed in him.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

Normally, [Grayson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/earl-grayson) is the first one up. But on December 30th, [Maniac](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/jeffrey-lionel-maniac-magee) is startled awake by silence. When he shakes Grayson, he realizes the truth. He sits by Grayson all day, holding his limp hand and talking to him. He even reads aloud Mike Mulligan’s Steam Shovel, Grayson’s favorite. Only that night does he finally cry.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Grayson has apparently died in his sleep of old age. Maniac has again lost someone he loves, and he grieves in the best way he knows how.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Grayson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/earl-grayson)’s funeral takes place on January 3rd. The pallbearers are from Two Mills’s trash collecting team. Nobody else shows up—just [Maniac](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/jeffrey-lionel-maniac-magee) and the funeral director. The minister gets held up in traffic. The pallbearers get restless in the cold. Finally, Maniac can no longer bear watching and waiting. He takes off running.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The makeshift (and undignified) character of Grayson’s funeral shows how little he was regarded by the wider world—and how much Maniac’s love therefore meant to him. Maniac’s instinct in the face of loss and grief is, once again, to run.