

The Family Under the Bridge Study Guide

The Family Under the Bridge by Natalie Savage Carlson

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Family Under the Bridge Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	5
Chapters 3-4.....	9
Chapters 5-6.....	12
Chapters 7-8.....	16
Chapter 9.....	20
Characters.....	23
Symbols and Symbolism.....	26
Settings.....	28
Themes and Motifs.....	29
Styles.....	33
Quotes.....	35



Plot Summary

Armand is a Paris hobo who lives under a bridge. He wanders the streets and chats with his gypsy friend Mireli. She tells him that he is about to have an adventure. Mireli tells him where gypsies have set up their camp and invites him to stay, but he declines. The prospect of an adventure appeals to him and he goes on about his day looking forward to whatever it might bring.

He wants the city until it's time for dinner. He spends two hours outside of a restaurant enjoying the smells wafting from inside. Armand returns to the bridge for the night and finds three children and a dog using his space under the bridge as their shelter. He doesn't care for children and tells them that they can't stay. Suzy, the eldest child, tries to compromise. She draws a rectangle on the concrete, giving Armand his own room. Evelyne and Paul, the other children, and Jojo, the dog, want Armand to stay.

Madame Calcet, the children's mother, returns from work and is angry to find Armand with her children. She doesn't want a hobo around her children. The children tell her that he's harmless. Meanwhile, Armand steels his heart against their kindness. He doesn't want to get close to anyone, but he does decide to stay in his designated rectangle.

The next morning, Madame Calcet goes to work at the laundromat and Armand prepares for his day. He reluctantly takes the children with him after they beg. They all set out for their adventure. He takes them to the Louvre Shop to see Father Christmas and the children ask Father Christmas for a new house because they lost theirs after their father died. Armand gets the children to sing carols and people begin to give them money. With the money, Armand buys them all pancakes and chestnuts. He even gets enough pancakes for Jojo to have some.

Madame Calcet is upset when she learns that Armand has taught her children how to beg. The next day, while she's at work, the children encounter two women who want to report them to the authorities. Armand overhears the women talking about the children and he whisks them away to hide with the gypsies. He introduces them to Mireli, Nikki, and Tinka, a gypsy close to Suzy's age. The gypsies take them in and teach them about their community. Paul befriends some of the gypsy boys and they teach him how to repair shoes.

Tinka explains to Suzy about how they don't go to school and Suzy tells her that she will teach her how to read and write. After seeing a trailer in the gypsy camp, the children decide they want a house on wheels for Christmas and ask Armand to tell Father Christmas about the house and where they're now staying.

For Christmas, the gypsies arrange for them to have a Christmas tree. Nikki chopped down a tree from the Jardin des Plantes and they decorated it for their new friends. A policeman arrives looking for Nikki and Mireli tells him that he's left town. Soon after, the gypsies pull up camp and head out. It appears that Paul has left with them, but he

returns after going and trying to get a job. Armand learns about a job as a night watchman from a friend and decides to take it. The job turns out to be a caretaker and the job comes with an apartment. Armand and his new family have found a place to live.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

Chapter one begins by introducing Armand, a hobo who lives on the street of Paris. He transports all of his belongings in a baby buggy and only owns the clothes on his back. It's Christmastime and there are lots of flowers all over the city. He takes some wilted flowers from Anabel's flower stand and puts a piece of holly in his buttonhole. Mireli, a fortune teller, stops and tells him that he will have an adventure. He knows her and they chat. He tells her that the Christmas crowds are sending him back under the bridge; he doesn't like all the children. Mireli tells him that he's scared of children because they might steal his heart. They part and he runs into some children; one is eating an apple. When they mock him, he thinks they must be speaking of his friend Louis, but Louis isn't to be found. He tells the boys that he will tell Father Christmas what they've done. The oldest boy exclaims that Father Christmas is a myth; the boy with the apple says he believes him. Armand leaves the children behind and goes and sits outside a restaurant to smell his meal. He stays for two hours because that's the proper amount of time for Frenchman to dine. When he gets to the bridge, he finds three children cuddled up in his spot. Suzy, the oldest girl, confronts Armand and tells him that they're staying together because they're a family.

Chapter two picks up with Armand's reaction. Jojo, the dog, is introduced and Armand resists the dog as much as the children. He asks what happened to the children. They explain that their landlady evicted them after their father died and they ran out of money. Their mother told them to hide so that the children wouldn't be taken away from her. Introductions are made: Suzy, the eldest, Paul, the middle, and Evelyne, the youngest. Paul declares that if he were bigger he'd find a new place for them. Armand tells them that they're shoving him out of his home like their landlady did. Suzy draws a rectangle on the concrete with a piece of coal. She tells him that it can be his room. The children ask for Armand to stay. He pulls his coat across his chest to cover his heart and starts to leave. Suzy begs him to stay and says they will pretend he's their grandfather. Armand scoffs at the idea, but unpacks his belongings for the night, including an old shoe which fits him perfectly and that he hopes to one day find its mate. He starts a fire for them with the branches and dead leaves he got from the florist. He starts to eat his supper and the children watch him. He relents and divides the food up evenly between him, the children, and the dog.

Madame Calcet, the children's mother, arrives and asks what Armand is doing there. He explains that the children have run him out of his spot. Madame Calcet declares that the bridges are the only shelter available to everyone. The children defend his character, but Armand responds that he is mean and hates children, women, and dogs. Paul counters by asking why he shared his food. Armand reluctantly reveals that he is a "soft-hearted tramp". Madame Calcet warms up some food and Armand views her as being too prideful. Armand suggests putting the children in a charity home; Madame Calcet replies that families should stick together. In the morning, Armand wonders why the



children haven't gone to school. Suzy explains that they can't go to school until they have a place to live because their mother is worried that they'll be taken from her. Suzy tells Armand that she wants to be a teacher when she grows up. The children ask to accompany Armand for the day. He relents and tells them that he'll take them to meet his friend Father Christmas. Madame Calcet has told the children that Father Christmas won't visit them this year because he doesn't know where they live. Armand tells them that they can go see him and tell him themselves where they are.

Analysis

At the outset of the novel, the author introduces the theme of poverty. While Armand may outwardly express a dislike of children, he is a friendly character. He maintains a bit of whimsy and charm, especially since he's outwardly ready for an adventure. The reality of Armand's situation, however, is bleak. He lives on the street of Paris, relying on the craftiness, resourcefulness, and the generosity of strangers to survive. All of his belongings fit into a tattered buggy that he pushes around the city. While this may be a practical approach for transport, it symbolizes the arrival of the children in his life. He only owns the clothes on his back. He doesn't have a job or a reliable source of food. Since the book is geared toward a younger audience, this type of poverty could potentially be troubling to a child. Yet the author manages to keep the tone light and the characters positive in order to offer younger readers a way into the material. There is even a sense of whimsy in the writing.

Mireli is introduced as a warm-hearted free-spirit offering to tell Armand's fortune. Like Armand's earlier comment about anticipating an adventure, Mireli reinforces the foreshadowing of something important coming. When Armand initially meets the young boys, this is a false promise of adventure. The boys are mean to Armand and belittle him by calling him names. Armand counters by threatening to tell Father Christmas about their behavior. This doesn't work with all of the boys, but it gets through to the youngest. This establishes Armand's relationship with Father Christmas and how he negotiates with children.

As a character, Armand is a recognizable cantankerous, grandfather-type figure. It's easy to recognize his reluctance to like children after the incident with the boys. This likely isn't the first time this has happened to him and it makes his character more empathetic. While many readers may not be able to readily relate to the direness of Armand's situation, most people can relate to how it feels when someone makes negative comments. This also prepares the reader for Armand's reaction when he meets the Calcet children. He resists them, not merely because they're occupying the place where he sleeps under the bridge, but because he anticipates a negative interaction. This also demonstrates the theme of independence.

As chapter two begins, Armand is introduced to Jojo, the dog. The dog is a faithful companion to the family and is protective of them. He is very much a part of the family unit, and this continues to reinforce the theme of family, just as Suzy's comment about the family sticking together at the conclusion of chapter one did. The theme of wealth



and poverty is seen in Armand's decision to share his food with the children and Jojo. While Armand doesn't have much, he has a generous spirit. He has more than the children and he's willing to share, showing the contrast between being rich and poor in the context of living on the street.

Suzy's decision to draw a room for Armand indicates her willingness to expand her family. She has a generous spirit. It also foreshadows how she will adapt to change and to new people as the novel progresses.

The reader is introduced to the lone shoe that Armand carries with him. He is hopeful that he'll find its mate because it's a perfect fit for him. This demonstrates the theme of hope and also foreshadows that the shoe will come into play later in the novel.

Madame Calcet is also introduced in chapter two. She is protective of her family as would be expected of a mother encountering her children in the company of a stranger. Soon into their interaction, Armand considers issues Madame Calcet has with her pride. He knows her transition to life on the street is going to be a struggle. While he is reserved in calling her out about her pride, he does offer the suggestion of putting the children in a charity home until things improve. Madame Calcet is not interested in charity, nor does she want to separate her family. This reinforces both the themes of pride and family.

Armand tells the children that he will take them to see Father Christmas. While their mother has prepared them for Father Christmas not visiting them this year, Armand clings to the tradition and gives the children hope that he will visit. Father Christmas is likely an easy way to relate to the children. Armand doesn't know much of anything about them, but understands the universality of Father Christmas. He has established this course of action previously with the mean boys he encountered in chapter one. This is one way Armand knows how to relate to children.

Discussion Question 1

What does Armand's decision to share his food with the children and Jojo reveal about his character?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Armand compare the children's actions to that of their former landlady?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it important for the reader to see Armand interact with the mean boys before the Calcet children are introduced?



Vocabulary

hobo, rent, burglar, ragged, fragile, hyacinths, oleander, bouquets, beret, gratitude, fastidiously, trundled, wheedled, gypsy, courtyard, abide, witless, twittering, tarnished, buttresses, urchins, loitering, droll, roguish, gargoyle, quay, niche, maneuvered, poverty, meandered, wriggled, indigently



Chapters 3-4

Summary

As chapter three begins, Armand and the children and Jojo make their way through the Paris streets. Armand comments on how the pigeons are always begging. Paul remarks that he wishes he had some corn to give them; Armand comments that people are always ready to feed the pigeons even when they haven't got anything. The city is alive with shoppers for the Christmas holiday, making the children easily distracted. When Paul picks up a toy soldier, Armand tells him that it's cheaply made and will break easily. When they pass a bakery, the children see a Yule Log cake. Armand tells him that he ate one once and it tasted like medicine. When they go by a chestnut vendor, Armand tells them that they taste like worms. They get to the Louvre store and go up to the mezzanine. They want to take the elevator, but it is too crowded and they take the stairs. The children are in awe of all the toys, but can't find Father Christmas. Finally, Father Christmas comes out from behind a counter, scolding a child who was playing with a train. His demeanor frightens the children and he quickly shifts into character. They tell him that they want a house for Christmas and he mistakes the request for a doll house. They explain that they want a real house and Father Christmas tries to redirect them with ideas of dolls and drums; the donkey can't deliver a house. Father Christmas takes Armand aside and tells him about a job as a night watchman. Armand tells him that he isn't looking for a job. A floorwalker spots Armand and the children and asks if they're in the wrong store. They leave.

Chapter four finds Armand taking the children to see a Christmas window at the Palais Royal Square. It's decorated lavishly with figurines dressed in old-fashioned, white costumes. Paul says that he's hungry and Armand tries to coax the children into singing. They're shy at first, claiming too many people are around. Once they get going, the children sing louder. Armand passes his cap for money. A floorwalker runs them off, telling them they can't beg in front of the Louvre. Armand takes the children for pancakes and chestnuts and gets enough for even Jojo to have some. While waiting by the buses, Armand gets them to sing again and they do so readily. Armand again passes him cap until he's interrupted by Titi and his monkey. Titi claims that they're infringing on his territory. Suzy and Evelyne both convince Armand to give him a bit of the money so that the monkey can get some pancakes. When they arrive at the bridge, Suzy tells her mother that she's saved her a pancake; Paul has saved her chestnuts. Madame Calcet is furious and accuses Armand of turning her children into beggars. She forbids Armand to have anything to do with the children. Armand leaves, even though the children beg their mother to let him stay. Evelyne refers to him as their grandpa.

Analysis

In chapters three and four, the theme of wealth vs. poverty is on display. There is a stark contrast between the opulence of the shop windows and the Louvre store and the



appearance of Armand and the children. They look out of place and are even sent away by the floorwalker. By asking Armand if he's in the wrong store, the floorwalker reinforces class roles. His job is to keep a darker side of reality out of sight from the other shoppers.

Father Christmas is introduced in chapter three and in an unexpected way. He scolds a child and then quickly changes his demeanor when he sees the Calcet children. This breaks the traditional perception of Father Christmas. It's an unexpected reality that mirrors the situation the Calcet children currently find themselves in. They want to believe and maintain hope and are relieved when Father Christmas shifts into character. The request for a house catches Father Christmas off guard and he tries to modulate their hope and reliance on Father Christmas. He doesn't want to completely diminish their request and suggests more reasonable gifts in turn. Father Christmas also takes Armand aside and tells him about a job as a night watchman. Armand dismisses the notion because he's still set on his independence. He remains an individual from the children and society. By turning down the opportunity he continues to demonstrate the theme of independence. The reader learning about the job as a night watchman, however, foreshadows what to expect as the novel continues to unfold.

It takes some coaxing from Armand to get the children to sing. The children are unaware of Armand's endgame: they pass his hat around for money. He knows that this is a way to earn some money and help to treat the children to pancakes and chestnuts. Once again a floorwalker runs them off, demonstrating the clash between wealth and poverty in the Louvre store. They go elsewhere and run off by Titi and his monkey. Titi, like Armand in the first chapter, is reluctant to have anyone infringe on what he perceives is his own. He rejects the competition. The children see themselves in the monkey and they want to be able to provide for the animal. They convince Armand to share some of their money. Just as Armand has been generous with them, they are, in turn, paying it forward.

Once they return to the bridge, it is revealed that Paul and Suzy have kept chestnuts and pancakes for their mother. Madame Calcet rejects the treats, but it has nothing to do with the food or that the children gave it to her. Rather it's the idea that these are things she couldn't provide them and she dismisses them. Once again this reflects Madame Calcet's struggle with pride. Similarly, her gesture is consistent with her character's continual rejection of charity. She wants to be able to provide for her family without the help of others. While she struggles with maintaining that kind of independence, the theme can be witnessed in her actions.

In her anger and frustration, Madame Calcet sends Armand away. This action reveals that while she struggles with providing for her family, even though she is working hard, a mere hobo has gotten the children treats. She doesn't want her children to become overly reliant on beggar tactics or even Armand. The children, however, are accepting Armand more readily. At the end of chapter four, Evelyne calls Armand grandpa. This shows the gradual inclusion of Armand into the family unit. Madame Calcet may continue to reject Armand, but her children are accepting him and she must see this.



Gradually she must begin to see the benefit of having Armand in their lives, but she has a long way to go.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Armand tell the children the toys will break and the cake tastes like medicine?

Discussion Question 2

What does Madame Calcet's decision to send Armand away reveal about her character?

Discussion Question 3

Why are the implications of Father Christmas telling Armand about the job as a night watchman?

Vocabulary

wares, coax, luscious, brazier, tantalizing, arcades, hawkers, mezzanine, reverently, blithely, declare, quivering, elegant, vagabonds, immaculately, haughtily, sedately, pavilion, gaudy, alms, rapped, quarrel, hustle, suspicious, retorted, forbid, dismally, laments



Chapters 5-6

Summary

Chapter five opens with Armand pushing his buggy along the river. He comes upon a man who is fishing. As the man reels in his line, he finds he's caught a shoe. Armand recognizes it as the mate to the shoe that fits him perfectly. The man gives him the shoe and Armand remarks that one should never give up hope. He finds shelter under another bridge and notes that the lines Suzy drew for him under the other bridge kept out the draft. He wakes to find that Paris was blanketed in snow overnight. He starts out for the day and passes two women, who call him a wretched creature. Armand sees Suzy and Evelyne huddling together and crying. They tell Armand that the two women were going to get someone. Paul is crying as well and they're all fearful that the women will return with the authorities and they'll be separated from their mother, and perhaps each other. Armand decides to hide the children at the gypsy camp and tells them that he'll return later to tell their mother where he's taken them. Suzy asks if Armand is going to tell Father Christmas where they're going just in case he's able to bring them a house for Christmas.

Armand leads the children through the Halles, a large food market in the center of Paris. The food is sold wholesale: fruits, vegetables, butchered meat. Once they make their way to the back of the Halles, Armand recognizes friends going through old fruits and vegetables that have been tossed in the gutter. He sees Charlot and Marguerite, and then he sees his friend Louis. Louis offers to get Armand a job as a pusher; Armand declines. He continues with the children past St. Eustache Church and shows them a section of the Court of Miracles, a place where beggars congregated in the early days of Paris. They come across a pack of dogs and Jojo goes after them, barking. The dogs are broken up by Mireli and she calms them with her voice. She welcomes Armand and the children and gets them something to eat. Armand offers celery, apples, and a dressed calf's head in trade. The children are shocked because they hadn't seen him take anything as they went through the market. The children are introduced to the gypsy children and they are divided up with kids their own age. Armand will share a tent with Petro, who sleeps all winter. Suzy meets Tinka, a gypsy girl, who shows the children her home, which is on wheels. Paul suggests they tell Armand to let Father Christmas know that he could bring them a house if it were on wheels.

Chapter six continues in the gypsy camp and they debate whether they will leave the wheels on the house if Father Christmas brings them one. Tinka takes the Calcet children into the house with wheels on it and shows them around. There are featherbeds in the back and on the floor. They sit and talk and Tinka tells them about traveling from Provence to the Mediterranean Sea each spring. She invites Suzy to join them in Provence, but Suzy declines, stating she has to go to school and that she needs to stick with her family. Tinka says the gypsies are a family too.



Armand goes to tell Madame Calcet about where he's taken the children. He explains about the older women seeing the children and wanting to interfere. Madame Calcet is upset about the women meddling in her affairs and Armand tells her that the children are safe. She tells him he's a good man and he leads her to the gypsy camp. She walks behind him and Armand knows it's because she doesn't want to be seen walking with a hobo. When they arrive at the gypsy camp, the gypsies are around the fire, there's song and dance. Madame Calcet is furious that Armand left her children with gypsies; she believes they're thieves. Armand defends them and explains that they're kind, generous, and resourceful; Madame Calcet relents. They have pigeon stew and she is reunited with her children. The next morning Tinka reveals to Suzy that she and the other children don't go to school. Since they can't read or write, Suzy jumps into action and begins to teach them. Instead of copying the letters Suzy has written on the wall, Tinka draws two circles, one inside the other; if it's on a gate, it means the people are good and generous. If the circles are crossed with lines, it means beggars aren't wanted. Armand leaves to go for a walk and the Suzy requests that he stop by the Louvre store to tell Father Christmas where to bring their new house and that they'd like one with wheels on it.

Analysis

As chapter five opens, Armand is pushing his buggy, calling back to the opening of chapter one. He's on his own and he's angry this time. When he comes upon the fisherman, he sees him pull out a shoe instead of a fish. Certainly this is disappointing for the fisherman and it mirrors the disappointment Armand must surely be feeling. But the shoe is a symbol of hope for Armand. Its discovery immediately changes his mood. If he can beat the odds and find the mate to a shoe he found, then perhaps the possibility of his being reunited with the children remains. That Armand finds the shoe immediately after leaving the Calcets foreshadows that there is hope for all of them as a family. Armand comments that even a hobo shouldn't give up hope, and that message is clear to the reader.

When Armand comments on the lines that Suzy drew keeping the draft out, the reader understands that Armand misses the children. He misses the warmth of a family and he is beginning to understand that maybe it is okay to let people in. The absence of those lines symbolizes his readiness, even if he isn't completely convinced.

The next morning, Armand happens to overhear the old women talking about the children being left alone. When he finds the children crying, he understands who the women were referring to. He springs into action to protect the children. His motivation stems from keeping the family unit together; that is his priority. On some level, he must understand that if the children are taken away, he will likely never see them again. He acts quickly and takes them to the gypsy camp. While he understands that Madame Calcet will likely be furious, he has dealt with her wrath before and is hopeful that she will understand that his actions are meant to keep the family together, rather than to merely expose the children to something else Madame Calcet might not approve of.



As Armand and the children make their way through the food market, Armand is once again offered a job, this time by his friend Louis. He rejects the offer again; Armand remains dedicated to his independence even while leading the children to the gypsy camp. While they travel, he shows them a place called the Court of Miracles. It's called the Court of Miracles because the beggars would fake ailments to get food and then come back to the shelter and feast. This mirrors the theme of wealth vs. poverty. Even in the early days of Paris, the beggars could shift from begging to having plenty of food in a day's time. While these were brief moments of transition, it demonstrates the opportunity; there is hope. When Armand shows the children the church and tells them about the beggars, he's reinforcing that there is hope. Once in the gypsy camp, the Calcet children are amazed that there is a house on wheels. They maintain their optimism and decide to revise their request for Father Christmas.

The children are introduced to the gypsies before Madame Calcet. This transition demonstrates how the children are better able to adapt to change and accept new things. It also shows the children how the gypsy camp functions as a family. The gypsy family is not just about blood relatives, but rather about all the people who come together as a community and protect and provide for their own. The children see this living arrangements first, foreshadowing how they accept Armand as part of their family before Madame Calcet does.

In chapter six, Madame Calcet learns where Armand has taken the children. When Armand takes her there, she deliberately walks several paces behind Armand. Armand understands her reluctance to be seen with him. Her actions continue to demonstrate the theme of pride. It is her pride that keeps her from accepting that she is like him, and more importantly, that it is okay to be like him. While she must remain hopeful that her family's situation will change for the better, she also needs to see that even one that she considers to have fallen so low still has value. Armand demonstrates his generosity to her family, even when she rejects him. That he continues to demonstrate this behavior in spite of Madame Calcet's rejection not only shows his strength of character, but also shows that Madame Calcet has more to learn before her situation improves.

Madame Calcet views the gypsies as thieves although she's likely never had any personal interactions with one. It is possible that prior to becoming homeless, she has had minimal interaction with any of the hobos. She views gypsies or hobos as things, or groups that aren't to be trusted; she struggles to see them as individuals. Her newfound status as a homeless person may leave her feeling that others must now be viewing her as she once did. She continues to separate herself from the groups as a matter of pride, but also to protect herself from the harsh glare she expects.

As chapter six concludes, so does the lesson, so to speak. Suzy, who told Armand she wants to be a teacher, fulfills her desire by teaching Tinka how to read and write. As Tinka demonstrates, there is more to learning than just rhetoric. Tinka gives Suzy some insight into how the gypsies communicate with each other by identifying those who are kind and those who reject the gypsies. This lesson demonstrates how much there is to learn from all walks of life and this further prepares the Calcets and Armand for their future.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Armand not reveal to the children that he's taken anything from the market until they get to the gypsy camp?

Discussion Question 2

What does Madame Calcet's repeated rejection of Armand and the gypsies reveal about her character?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it important for Armand to defend the gypsies to Madame Calcet?

Vocabulary

ferociously, moored, sodden, fretting, assert, wretches, carcasses, immense, bustle, teeming, asphalt, mosaic, dingy, rakish, dilapidated, crags, pantaloons, beady, hastened, courteously, highbrow



Chapters 7-8

Summary

Chapter seven begins on Christmas Eve with the Calcet children excited for the house on wheels. Tinka tries to talk them into driving to Provence in the spring to meet them at the shrine of Saint Sara. Tinka explains the story of Saint Sara being a handmaiden to Saint Mary Jacobe and Saint Mary Salome after the Crucifixion. The gypsies make a pilgrimage to Saint Sara's church because she was a gypsy. Armand wants to distract the children from talking about the house and asks if they want to go to a Christmas Eve party under the Tournelle Bridge. There will be singing, and sauerkraut and wieners to eat. Suzy wants Tinka to come along, but she explains that the gypsies have their own party. Nikki offers to drive them to the party because he needs to stop at the Jardin des Plantes.

At the party, Madame Calcet looks up to a restaurant above the bridge and sees people dresses in their finest clothes. Armand leads her into the party and many hobos mill about. While the children sit on the curb, Madame Calcet continues to stand. She helps a young girl carry food and tells her that's she's not a tramp. Suzy tells Armand that she's excited to see the house that Father Christmas is bringing them. Finally, Armand tells her that too many gypsy children asked for them this year and he didn't have one left for them. Upset, Suzy questions whether Father Christmas will bring them any kind of house. Armand lies and tells her that Father Christmas is having one built for them and that it just isn't ready yet. He swears her to secrecy from telling Madame Calcet about the house.

Armand is ready to go around midnight and Madame Calcet insists that they need to go to the midnight mass. Even Jojo goes and it's his first time in church. They return to the gypsy camp in the wee hours of the morning to find the gypsies still awake and waiting for them. The gypsies decorated an evergreen tree for them; on the top of the tree is a copper star. Nikki cut the tree down at the Jardin des Plantes and tells them that the sign next to it said it was a rare tree from India. The gypsy children give the Calcet little presents: nuts, candies, small toys. Tinka tells them they like to give gifts because one of the Three Wise Men was a gypsy. Madame Calcet gives Armand a gift: a pink bar of soap.

Chapter eight finds Suzy worried about how much time Paul plays with the gypsies, almost as though he's not part of her family anymore. Armand assures her that he just wants to play with the other boys, but Paul declares that he wishes he were a gypsy and he wants to go with them in the spring. He's also learned to work with copper and the other gypsies have helped him mend his shoes. A policeman arrives looking for Nikki. Mireli offers to tell his fortune; he declines and asks about Nikki. She tells him that he's left town and she doesn't know when he'll return. After the policeman leave, the gypsies start to pack up their camp; they need to wait until the rest of the men return for the day before they can leave. Mireli invites Armand to join them and Paul wants to go. Armand



tells him he can't go because he has to stay with his family, when Paul argues, Armand informs him that Paul can't go because he has red hair and people would think the gypsies kidnapped him. Suzy asks to go look at the new house and Armand shamefully admits that there isn't going to be a house because the builders didn't want children or dogs in the new house. The gypsies are ready to go and Nikki is upset that he's lost his wallet. Nikki informs Armand that they've left one of the tents and that they've got one more week of rent paid to the wreckers. With the gypsies gone, they realize that Paul has left with them. Armand doesn't know how to tell Madame Calcet.

Later, Paul returns; he hadn't left with the gypsies, but rather had gone to the Halles to get a job as a pusher. They turned him away because he was too small. The men laughed at him and told him to push a cart, but he couldn't make it budge. The policeman returns and asks about the gypsies; he has a wallet to return to Nikki. Armand offers to return it to him, but the policeman leaves, stating he can only give it to the rightful owner. Armand tells the children that he's going to get a job and that everything will be okay.

Analysis

Chapter seven finds the children caught up in the excitement of Christmas Eve. The Calcet children, in particular, are excited to see if Father Christmas will bring them a house. At this juncture, Tinka begins to tell them more about life in the gypsy camp and their travels. It's also the first time there is a shift to religious imagery. The story of Saint Sara is told. Saint Sara is the patron saint of the gypsies.

Armand continues to distract the children from focusing too much on Father Christmas. He's protective of the children and knows that they're in for a crushing blow when Father Christmas doesn't deliver. The party is a celebration, demonstrating that even those down on their luck can celebrate and enjoy the holidays. While the party is secular in nature, it does shift the focus from the materialism of the holiday (as is represented by the shops and Father Christmas) to one about the meaning of the holiday. The hobos and tramps can all gather and enjoy each other's company. They might not have the finest French food to eat like the wealthy people Madame Calcet witnesses eating in the restaurant above the bridge, but they can still celebrate.

Madame Calcet continues to resist her new-found station. When she tells the girl with the food that she's not a tramp, it's not only to separate herself from the girl and others, but also to convince herself. Although Madame Calcet goes through the motions of the party and enjoys herself, she must remind herself that this isn't where she belongs. While this reinforces the theme of pride, it also shows that Madame Calcet is not giving up. She wants better for herself and her family. If she accepts the label of tramp or hobo, then she's lost hope.

Madame Calcet also decides to attend Midnight Mass, the second instance of religious imagery. The family, including Jojo, attends the service. This is likely a tradition for Madame Calcet and this can connect her with her life prior to being homeless. The



mass offers a sense of peace and community. During the mass, they are all part of a larger family and this continues to foreshadow the changes to come.

In a conversation between Suzy and Armand, Armand relents and tells her that Father Christmas won't be bringing them a house. He can't bring himself to completely crush her spirit, so he lies to her about a house being built. Armand has been on the streets a long time and likely knows how dark times get when hope is distinguished. He needs to offer this hope to Suzy to keep her going.

The Christmas tree that Nikki chopped down is a rare evergreen from India. The tree is a gift for the Calcets and a symbol of friendship. The rarity of the tree selected, however, can be viewed in multiple ways. Nikki may have simply needed a tree and got the one he could without any concern for the rarity of the tree; it was merely a tree that served a purpose for him. The rarity of the tree may also indicate that Nikki decided the gypsies new friends were worth it. The tree could also symbolize the sacrifices people make for their family.

In chapter eight, Suzy begins to show some concern for Paul. She thinks he's getting too close to the gypsies. While Paul is forthright in his desire to be like the gypsies, his attitude may reflect his desire for being part of a larger family. He may also want to exude his independence. Throughout the novel, Paul talks about how he would do more for his family if he was older or bigger. This doesn't seem like the behavior of someone who would turn away from the family he knows and leave with the gypsies. Ultimately, when the gypsies do pack up camp and leave, Paul disappears. The assumption is that he's joined them, but his absence merely coincides with Paul making another attempt to help his family by trying to get a job.

It can be argued that Paul's attempt to get a job is the final jolt for Armand to commit to the family and get a job. Just as Paul has made repeated comments about providing for the family, Armand has repeatedly turned down employment offers. Perhaps it was also the thought of Paul leaving with the gypsies that sparks something with Armand; he doesn't want to lose anyone from his new family. In order to keep the family together, he's now willing to sacrifice some of his independence to provide for them.

The theme of family can also be witnessed in how Mireli handles the police officer. While the gypsies don't know exactly why the police officer wants to see Nikki, they know enough about what's he's done that they want to protect him. They don't want to see one of their own sent to jail. While it is later revealed that the police officer wanted to return Nikki's wallet, the gypsies don't learn of this development.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Armand ask Suzy to keep the secret about the house being built for them?



Discussion Question 2

What does Madame Calcet's gift of soap to Armand reveal about her character?

Discussion Question 3

Why doesn't Armand go with the gypsies when Mireli extends an invitation?

Vocabulary

pilgrimage, adrift, rudder, handmaiden, wistfully, distinguished, honey-combed, enviously, indigestion, chilblains, tidbits, gnawing, bitterly, flickering, solemn, vestments, blundered, misery, ashamed, boasted, celluloid, idly, traipsing, gaped, vaguely, peered, appealed, rebelliously, forlorn, indignant, vagabond



Chapter 9

Summary

At the start of chapter nine, Madame Calcet has overheard Armand tell the children he will get a job, and she won't let him do that. Armand tells her that it's the right thing to do and that they will be able to live off of both of their salaries. Because they aren't relatives, Madame Calcet doesn't think Armand should have to, but the children disagree, referring to him as their grandfather. Armand takes a bath and also gives one to Jojo, who comes out pure white. Suzy and Madame Calcet clean up Armand's clothes while he takes a bath. Suzy trims Armand's beard. Paul has repaired Armand's shoes.

Armand tells the children that he's going to get a job as a night watchman. He takes Jojo and they head to the Louvre store. It's the New Year and the store is bustling. When he finds Monsieur Latour, Monsieur Latour doesn't recognize him from when he asked Armand to leave the store earlier. As they speak, he thinks he remembers where they've met before: at a dog show. Armand concurs and explains that Jojo has won many blue ribbons. He redirects about the job and Monsieur Latour gives him the address for Monsieur Brunot.

On the walk to Monsieur Brunot's place, Armand looks around and thinks of the places he will spend time on spring days, such as on the square. He makes his way to Rue de l'Opera and turns down a more modest side street. He passes through a brick courtyard and buildings with mismatched bricks. He encounters Monsieur Brunot and asks about the night watchman job. Monsieur Brunot explains that he actually needs a caretaker for the building and that he's looking for a family man to take it.

Armand tells him about his grandchildren and Monsieur Brunot pets Jojo. He introduces himself as Armand Pouly and tells him that he's a good worker. The pay is low, but the job comes with an apartment. It's small and the paint is peeling, but Armand sees the rooms differently. He pictures the curtains and fresh paint and Madame Calcet cooking in the kitchen, and the children studying and playing. Monsieur Brunot offers him the job and asks him to start tomorrow. Armand tells him that they will be able to move in that afternoon.

Analysis

Chapter nine opens with Madame Calcet resisting Armand's decision to get a job to help the family. Madame Calcet continues to hold on to the traditional definition of the family. She is the last one to adapt as the children have accepted him as their grandfather. Madame Calcet must put aside her pride and allow Armand into the family. Just as Armand has resisted for so long, they both must now surrender.



This surrender is marked by Armand and Jojo's baths. Both wash themselves of their old lives and are reborn. This rebirth is especially noted by Jojo's pure white appearance after being cleaned. While Armand is making strides to help the family, Suzy and Paul both do things for Armand, Suzy trims his beard and Paul fixes his shoes, demonstrating how they are all coming together as a family to make this new family work.

Armand gets a boost to his ego when he returns to the Louvre store and Monsieur Latour, the floorwalker, recognizes him, but can't place him. He mistakes Armand and Jojo for being participants in a dog show. Armand plays along. He enjoys being treated respectfully. Monsieur Latour's reaction demonstrates how appearances can be deceiving. It also shows how one's station in life can be a façade and that one shouldn't be judged merely by appearance.

The job Armand thinks he's going to get is as a night watchman. In a way, Armand has been a symbolic watchman of the family. He has watched over the children since meeting them, providing them food, shelter, and protection from the women who wanted to turn the children into the authorities. Likewise, all the things that Armand has done for the family has prepared him for the actual job: caretaker. Monsieur Brunot states he wants a family man for the job. Up until this point, Armand wouldn't have been qualified. Now that he has found his family, he is ready and willing to do the job.

Armand's journey through the city took him through more opulent areas of Paris, but Armand isn't disappointed when he sees where the job is. The mismatched bricks and chipped paint doesn't bother him. Armand can see the potential for his new family. The apartment is symbolic of the family: mismatched pieces that come together to make something whole. The job comes with lowered wages because it includes housing. This marks wish fulfillment for the Calcet children. While they didn't get their house on wheels, they now have a place to call their own.

Discussion Question 1

What does Monsieur Latour's treatment of Armand reveal about his character?

Discussion Question 2

What makes Madame Calcet finally accept Armand into the family?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Armand choose to take Jojo with him on his job interview?



Vocabulary

astonishment, enchanted, admiration, flourish, dignity, humbler, spectacles, linoleum, sober, industrious, bric-a-brac, wisteria



Characters

Armand

Armand is an affable hobo living on the streets of Paris. He has been on the streets long enough that when he's asked, he can't remember his own last name. He thinks it is Pouly or Pougly; it's not until the end of the novel that his last name is revealed as Pouly. A resourceful man, he interacts with the city in such a way that it provides for him: from using the wilted branches for kindling or enjoying the scent of a fine Parisian meal.

A solitary man, he's up for adventure, but is protective of his heart. He's been on his own for so long that he doesn't want to get emotionally invested. When he encounters the children, he tries to shield himself from their charms. He's capable of loving, but outwardly reluctant to do so.

He keeps all of his belongings in an old buggy and all the clothes he owns are on his back. He cares just enough about his appearance that he places a piece of holly in his lapel.

When Armand spends the first day with the children, he shows that he cares for their well-being in spite of his insistence that he doesn't want to get close to them. When Paul sees a toy he likes, Armand tells him it will break. When the children see the Christmas cake, he tells them it tastes like medicine. Instead of having the children think they're missing out on something, he'd rather distract them.

Suzy

Suzy is the eldest of the three Calcet children and has red hair and blue eyes. When Armand balks at the children staying in his spot under the bridge, Suzy reaches out to negotiate. She is a natural problem-solver. When she first meets Armand, she offers to make him a "room" and draws a rectangle with a piece of coal for him to sleep in.

During one of her earliest conversations with Armand, she declares that she would like to be a teacher one day. When Armand takes the children to stay at the gypsy camp, Suzy quickly befriends Tinka. Initially she is shocked to learn that Tinka and the other gypsy children don't go to school, so she offers to teach them how to read and write.

She is protective of her family. When Paul befriends the boys in the gypsy camp, she becomes agitated that he's spending so much time with them. Suzy is also responsible for asking Father Christmas for a house.



Madame Calcet

Madame Calcet is the mother of the three children. Recently widowed, she and her children are living on the Paris streets after their landlady evicts them. She has taken a job in a laundromat to support her family, but it's not enough. Worried about losing her children, Madame Calcet pulled her children from school to keep the authorities from learning that they are homeless. She doesn't want them to be separated or go to a home.

When she first meets Armand she is angry with him. She doesn't want her children consorting with a hobo. She considers herself above the people who live on the street and Armand views her as being too prideful. When she meets the gypsies, she considers them thieves. Her reluctance to accept her current situation reflects both her fear and her pride.

While she gradually comes to terms with her current life, she grows closer to Armand and begins to see what the children see in him. For Christmas, she gives Armand a bar of pink soap, which he later uses before his job interview. She comes to recognize the positive influence Armand has on her family, just as they positively influence him.

Paul

Paul is the middle child and red-headed like his sisters. He wants to do right by his family and be able to provide for them; unfortunately, he's simply too young to do so. He tells Armand that he would like to find a house for them, and that he would get a job if he could. He befriends the other boys in the gypsy camp and they teach him how to repair shoes. In turn, Paul repairs Armand's found shoes so that they can be worn on his job interview. When the gypsies pick up camp, it appears that Paul has joined them. He later reappears and discloses that he went to get a job as a pusher, but learned he wasn't strong enough for the job. In part this helps motivate Armand to take a job. When he sees Father Christmas he asks for something to eat.

Evelyne

Like her brother and sister, Evelyne is a red-head. She's the youngest of the three children and asks Father Christmas for a doll after her request for a house is denied. She's agreeable and good-natured.

Mireli

Mireli is Armand's gypsy friend. She is first introduced by offering to tell Armand's future. When he recognizes her, she tells him that an adventure awaits him. Protective of her own, she deflects the police from tracking down Nikki after the tree is stolen. She also challenges Madame Calcet about the perceptions of the gypsies.



Tinka

Tinka is a young gypsy similar in age to Suzy. Suzy befriends her quickly and offers to teach her to read and write. Tinka helps decorate the Christmas tree for the children.

Jojo

Jojo is the little dog belonging to the Calcets. He is tinged grey with dirt. Once he gets a bath at the end of the novel, he is pure white and is mistaken for a show dog by Monsieur Latour at the Louvre store.

Louis

Louis is one of Armand's hobo friends. When the young boys in the beginning of the book mock Armand for being an old tramp, Armand thinks they must be referring to Louis. Louis offers to get Armand a job as a pusher.

Monsieur Brunot

Monsieur Brunot is who Armand goes to see about the job as a night watchman. He reveals that the job is as a caretaker. He needs someone who is a family man. He is pleasant and jovial.



Symbols and Symbolism

Birds

Armand refers to the Calcet children as birds throughout the novel. The bird imagery symbolizes how Armand views his relationship with the children as temporary. He just needs to help them get out of the nest. This also helps to keep him detached from relating to them as children as he continues to protect his heart from them. By the end of the novel, Armand has stopped referring to them as “starlings” or “nestlings” and refers to them as children or by name as he accepts the family bond that’s been forged.

Gypsies

The gypsies symbolize the family unit that will form with Armand, Madame Calcet, and the children. The family unit may not be traditional, but will protect and provide for each other.

Bridge

Armand meets the children under a bridge. The bridge symbolizes the transition the Calcets and Armand undergo to become a family. They all go through the hardships to get to a happier place. That journey is like crossing over the bridge.

White

White symbolizes purity and demonstrates the contrast between where Armand and the children are in the beginning of the novel and where they end up. Snow blankets Paris, giving it a fresh appearance. When Jojo gets a bath at the end of the novel, he is pure white.

Bathing

Bathing is a symbol of rebirth. Madame Calcet gives Armand the pink for him to use to get cleaned up and make himself presentable for his job interview. Likewise, when Jojo gets his bath, he goes from dingy to a pure white.

Dog

Jojo is a faithful companion to the family. He symbolizes the trust that develops between Armand and the children. Just as the dog follows his family willingly, the children follow Armand.



Father Christmas

Father Christmas is the French version of Santa Claus. He represents hope and opportunity. He also brings an element of whimsy and joy to the children as they go through a difficult time.

New Year

The New Year holiday is symbolic of the fresh start Armand and his new family gets at the close of the novel.

Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree is a gift the gypsies offer to the Calcet children. It symbolizes their generosity and kind spirit, and how they've accepted the Calcets into their world. That the tree is a rare evergreen from India further demonstrates their feelings.

Shoes

Armand has one shoe that fits him perfectly and he carries it around with him in hope of finding its mate. When he does, it symbolizes Armand finding his family in the children and Madame Calcet.



Settings

The Bridge

The bridge is where Armand lives and where he meets Suzy, Paul, Evelyne, and Madame Calcet. Suzy draws a square on the floor to give Armand his own room. Armand has been living there for some time and it's been reliable shelter. It's also the location where two women find the children and decide to report them.

The Halles

The Halles is a market where fruits, vegetables, and meats are sold. Behind the Halles is where the gypsies set up camp. Mireli invites Armand to join them before he meets the children. He declines, but later takes the children to hide there after he overhears two women discussing reporting the children. The camp is lively with trailers for shelter. The gypsies steal a tree and decorate it for Christmas to make the children feel more at home.

The Louvre Store

The Louvre store is an upscale store for shopping and eating. Father Christmas works there and Armand takes the children there to see him. It's also where Armand learns about a job that he initially declines and later takes. During their first visit there, Armand coaxes the children into singing carols for money.

The Apartment

The apartment appears at the conclusion of the novel. It is offered as part of Armand's compensation for his new job. It's where he will live with Madame Calcet and the children.

Jardin des Plantes

Jardin des Plantes is the public garden where Nikki chops down a tree to decorate as a Christmas tree as a surprise for the Calcet children.



Themes and Motifs

Family

The theme of family can be traced through *The Family under the Bridge*. As the book begins, Armand is a solitary character. He interacts with people he knows, but he relishes his solitude. Once he meets the children under the bridge, his outlook begins to change.

Armand is reluctant to form any attachment to the children. His initial reaction is to send them away. As he spends time with them he becomes protective of his heart as he is fearful that they'll get to him. At the same time, Armand is also becoming protective of the children.

He cares for the children as a grandfather would. He takes them to see Father Christmas and after they make money from singing carols, he treats them to pancakes and chestnuts. As he grows closer to the children and their mother, his need to provide for them grows. He even takes a job to help to support them, even providing them with a place to live.

The children and Madame Calcet are a family going through a difficult time. They lost their home after the children's father died. Madame Calcet is doing her best to provide for them and keep them all together as a family. She keeps them out of school so that the authorities won't find out that they're living on the street; she doesn't want to lose her children.

When Armand overhears the two women talking about reporting the children, he jumps into action to keep the family together.

The gypsies also demonstrate the theme of family. They are protective of each other. When the police ask about Nikki and his involvement with chopping down the tree, they tell the officer that he's left. They don't want Nikki to get caught or get in trouble, especially for doing something that was meant to show kindness to their new friends. They take in Armand and the children without question and befriend them. When Madame Calcet tells them that she will pay for their hospitality, Mireli tells her that they don't take money from friends.

The gypsies help the children celebrate Christmas and invite them to come along when it's time to leave for their next destination. This appears to interest Paul, but Paul's disappearance is somewhat misleading. He has gone to the store to try to get a job to help provide for the family. Paul's actions are one of the final pushes Armand needs to accept the children and Madame Calcet as his family and get a job.



Independence

The theme of independence can be seen primarily in Armand's actions. At the start of the novel, he is pleased with his independence. He likes his freedom. When Mireli extends an invitation to Armand to join the gypsy camp, he declines, preferring to be on his own.

Meeting the children marks a drastic change in Armand's lifestyle. As he spends more time with the children, he physically covers his chest with his coat to protect his heart from the children. When he is offered a job at the Louvre shop, he resists in order to maintain his independence.

The gypsy camp demonstrates the theme of independence as well. Gypsies exist outside of traditional society. Their vagabond nature takes them from place to place and they maintain independence from any city or country.

Of the children, Paul is the most independent. While staying with the gypsies, he bonds with the other boys and learns from them. When the gypsies pull up camp, it looks as though he has decided to join them. When he returns, it is revealed that he has gone to try and get a job to help support his family. He exercises this act of independence to demonstrate his will that he can take action to help, even if he is too young to do the job. It shows how Paul is making decisions for himself.

Madame Calcet also demonstrates the theme of independence. She has lost her husband and must find a way to provide for herself and her children. She takes a job at a laundromat and leaves the children alone during the day. Her reluctance to Armand's arrival and her anger toward him when he teaches the children how to beg shows her independence. She doesn't want to rely on charity. She wants to be able to take care of herself and her children.

Pride

The theme of pride is evident throughout the novel. It's demonstrated by the way in which different characters react to their situations.

When Armand is introduced he is a man who likes his independence. He is proud of who he is and how he lives his life not relying on the more traditional constructs of society: a job, a family, a house. When Mireli offers him a place to stay at the gypsy camp, he declines. He is proud to be on his own. This pride may also be Armand's defense mechanism for coping with the hardships of life as a hobo. When he comments about Madame Calcet's pride, he acknowledges that he lost his pride long ago. He is aware of how pride is reflected in others, but may not be able to see the way in which he uses his. Another way in which Armand demonstrates pride is when the floorwalker at the Louvre shop asks Armand and the children if they are in the wrong store. Armand retorts that yes, they are in the wrong store.



Madame Calcet's pride differs from Armand's. Her pride is in the way of asking for or taking help from others. She doesn't want to rely on charity. Her position on the streets is a relatively new development. She's adjusting to how her life has changed, even if it's reluctantly. She is embarrassed of her situation and deflects her new found status. After Armand stops a young girl carrying bowls on Christmas Eve, Madame Calcet offers to help her carry the food. She tells the girl that she is not a tramp, separating herself from Armand's status.

The gypsies are proud of their culture and how they live their lives. When Madame Calcet comments about how the gypsies are dishonest, Armand defends them. He asks why she thinks she's better than the gypsies. Madame Calcet states that she's honest. Later, Mireli tells Madame Calcet that they proudly don't take money from their friends.

Hope

Armand is hopeful that he will one day find the mate to a shoe he found that fits him perfectly. In chapter five, Armand finds the other shoe. He remarks that even a hobo shouldn't give up hope. This suggests that no matter one's lot in life or an individual's struggle, hope should be maintained.

The novel takes place during Christmas time, recognized by many as a season of hope. The children are hopeful that Father Christmas will bring them a house for Christmas. When Father Christmas explains that he can't bring them a house, he says that the donkey wouldn't be able to carry it. Once the children discover the house on wheels at the gypsy camp, they feel like they've found a solution to the problem with the donkey bringing the house.

Armand doesn't encourage the children to ask for the house or try to keep their spirits up that their wish will be fulfilled. He does, however, give the children false hope. As Christmas Eve approaches, he can't continue to let the children believe and subsequently be disappointed on Christmas morning when there isn't a house from Father Christmas. But he also can't completely ruin their perception of Father Christmas; he wants the children to continue to believe and remain hopeful. He lies when he tells them that a house is being built for them so that they can hold on to the possibility of a house awhile longer. Ultimately, he relents and tells them that there isn't going to be a house.

The New Year marks a time of opportunity and fresh starts. It is at the New Year that the novel concludes. Armand has gotten a job as a caretaker and that comes with an apartment as part of compensation for the job. Armand and Jojo have both been cleaned and go out with a fresh outlook on life. When Monsieur Latour mistakes Armand for someone he met at a dog show, Armand doesn't correct him. He is making the best of his new outlook on life. The idea of a job, a place to live, and a family gives him hope.



Poverty vs. Wealth

The theme of poverty vs. wealth is evidenced throughout the novel. In its most obvious way it can be seen at literal poverty of people living on the streets. Armand has made peace with his lot in life. He takes to heart simple pleasures and makes the best of his situation. This demonstrates that while he is literally poor, he is rich in his mindset. However, he is reluctant to accept change, more importantly, to allow others to get close to him; in this way he begins the novel emotionally poor.

When Armand take the children to the Louvre Store, this represents the starkest contract between poverty and wealth. The store is bustling with holiday shoppers, lots of toys, and sweets, while Armand works to dissuade the children from desiring such things. When the floorwalker suggests to Armand that they're in the wrong store, they leave. In a shop filled with riches, they are out of place.

Ultimately, Armand is able to understand that while he may be literally poor, by letting the children get close to him that he becomes wealthy with family. This leads to his decision to take the job as a night watchman. When he arrives to speech with Monsieur Brunot, he learns that the job is actually as a caretaker.

Likewise, the gypsies show a similar relationship with poverty and wealth. They may have a reputation for being thieves, but their wealth is demonstrated in how they respect their community and each other. This is most evident when Mireli informs Madame Calcet that they don't steal from their friends. Further, they share what they have with their friends and the people they take into their family unit. Armand, the children, and Madame Calcet are all provided with food and shelter upon their arrival. Later, Nikki steals a tree so that their new friends will have a Christmas tree to celebrate the holiday.



Styles

Point of View

The Family Under the Bridge is written in a third person narrative. The primary focus is on Armand and his journey from being a solitary hobo to wanting to preserve the family life that he's now found. His character influences those around him as he tries to understand and explain why people act and treat people the way they do.

At the beginning of the novel, Armand celebrates the freedom of his lifestyle and maintains a positive outlook. He's been along long enough that he resists the notion of sharing his life with others. Meeting the children under the bridge forces Armand's perspective to change. The reader gets to know Armand the best.

Madame Cacet's point of view is one largely of embarrassment. She can't believe that her family has fallen this far in society. She distances herself in actions and words from the hobos and gypsies. Her perspective is likely in line with what many would feel given a similar situation. The contrast of Madame Calcet and Armand's perspective serve to balance each other and teach tolerance and compassion.

While there is some insight into the plight of the homeless, such as when Armand sits outside a restaurant to smell a meal and when Armand is told he doesn't belong at the Louvre shop, the novel remains light-hearted fare. Instead of dwelling on the negative aspects of the situation, the focus acknowledges the hardships and moves forward. It is an optimistic book that focuses on community and family.

Language and Meaning

The language used in the novel is straightforward and not overly challenging. Some of the vocabulary may challenge younger readers, but the author often uses larger words as adverbs and adjectives, thereby enhancing the writing without sacrificing clarity for younger readers.

Children are the intended audience. The story is accessible and relatable for children. While the subject matter may invite conversation about the harsh realities of living on the street, it doesn't dwell on the subject matter. The tone is optimistic and focuses on problem solving and working together.

There is an emphasis on family, particularly non-traditional families. Armand is a loner who adopts the children as part of his family just as the children do with him. Similarly, the gypsies are ready to take in the Calcet's and demonstrate how they take care of their own, from getting a Christmas tree for the Calcet children to redirecting the policeman to protect Nikki.



The novel relies on the tropes of the magic of the holiday season. The children are hopeful that Father Christmas will be able to bring them a house for Christmas. Likewise, Armand goes to see about the job as the night watchman at New Year. Armand and the Calcet's get the fresh start that is so often associated with the holiday season.

Structure

The novel is comprised of nine chapters of similar length. Illustrations are included sporadically throughout the novel. The story is linear and no flashbacks are used. Each chapter concludes and the action picks up immediately after in the next chapter.

As the novel begins, Armand is living a solitary life. He is jovial, but is protective of his heart; he doesn't want anyone, especially children, to get close to him. Mireli is introduced in the first chapter and tells his fortune: he will have an adventure. This sets up Armand's journey over the course of the novel.

Armand meets the children under the bridge he calls home. They are already in his home for when he is ready to accept the family into his life. The more time Armand spends with the children, the closer he gets to seeing Mireli again. By the time he reaches the gypsy camp, Armand's character arc has prepared him for the next phase of his life.

The gypsies are a non-traditional family, and a family regardless of whether they're biologically related. It is when the gypsies pick up camp and move on that Armand makes the decision to get a job and help provide for his new family. This prepares Armand's arc for the final reveal of the job and the apartment for the family to live in.

The novel is set during the winter in Paris and opens just before Christmas. It marks turning points at Christmas Eve, when the children remain hopeful that Father Christmas will bring them a house, and at New Year when Armand begins his new job. The holiday season helps to bring focus on the theme of hope, and offers the new family a fresh start as the new year begins.



Quotes

You're afraid the sly little things will steal your heart if they find out you have one.
-- Mireli (Chapter 1 paragraph 17)

Importance: Mireli lets the reader know how closed off and protective Armand is of his heart and feelings.

Armand sat in the rectangle marked by Suzy and thought that this woman's trouble was pride, and that pride and life under the bridge weren't going to work out well together.
-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 31)

Importance: Armand sits in the box that Suzy drew for him and ponders Madame Calcet's struggle with the emotional box with which her pride confines her.

Even people who haven't any food themselves are ready to feed the pigeons. Wish I was one.
-- Armand (Chapter 3 paragraph 8)

Importance: Armand's comment about wishing he was a pigeon reveals, not only his desire for food, but his desired to be cared for by others.

Don't be stupid starlings without a song in your throats. Open you little beaks and sing like canaries.
-- Armand (Chapter 4 paragraph 11)

Importance: This reinforces the bird imagery throughout the novel; Armand views the children as creatures who need guidance and protection. It's easier for him to relate to them as birds as he struggles to let them into his heart.

This isn't as cozy as the room that canary made for me," he admitted. "Funny how those black lines on the concrete kept out the draft.
-- Armand (Chapter 5 paragraph 7)

Importance: Armand is beginning to soften his feelings for the children and see the benefit of having them in his life.

We gypsies stick together too," she said.
-- Tinka (Chapter 6 paragraph 11)

Importance: Tinka defends the non-traditional life of the gypsies by equating them to family values.

What's wrong with gypsies?" asked Armand. "Why do you think you are better? Are you kinder? Are you more generous?
-- Armand (Chapter 6 paragraph 30)



Importance: Armand challenges Madame Calcet's views on the gypsies in order to help her better see the new world around her.

Today is today and tomorrow may come late this year.
-- Mireli (Chapter 8 paragraph 20)

Importance: Mireli uses this line to deflect the policeman from finding Nikki. It's at once deliberately confusing and able to reflect how the gypsies may have a different view on how they relate to time.

There was nothing left to show that gypsies had ever lived in this yard. Nothing but a weather-beaten tent and the dead ashes of their fires.
-- Narrator (Chapter 8 paragraph 58)

Importance: This quote speaks to the efficiency with which the gypsies can pick up camp and move onward to the next destination. It shows how transient they are.

Madame Calcet was the most surprised of all when she heard that Armand planned to take a regular job.
-- Narrator (Chapter 9 paragraph 1)

Importance: Madame Calcet's perception of Armand has been going through a slow, but gradual change. Her surprise indicates how far Armand has come in conjunction with her expectations.

It was Jojo looking as if he had fallen into a bucket of whitewash.
-- Narrator (Chapter 9 paragraph 27)

Importance: Jojo's fresh appearance marks the transition from one life to the next; he and Armand have washed the old life away to make room for the new.

We really want a family man.
-- Monsieur Brunot (Chapter 9 paragraph 72)

Importance: Monsieur Brunot's comment marks Armand's complete transformation from hobo to having a family and no longer wanting an isolated life.