

Bud, Not Buddy



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHRISTOPHER PAUL CURTIS

Christopher Paul Curtis was born on May 10, 1953, in Flint, Michigan, a place that would later become the setting of some of his most famous works. He was born to Dr. Elmer Curtis and Leslie Jane Curtis and is the second oldest of five siblings. While Curtis was growing up, his father practiced podiatry for some time before ultimately beginning a job at an assembly line for better pay. It wasn't too long before Curtis followed his lead. After graduating from Flint Southwestern High School in 1972, Curtis enrolled at the University of Michigan's Flint campus and applied for a job at Fisher Body Plant No. 1 General Motors assembly facility. This allowed Curtis to make decent pay, which went towards paying for his part-time degree (which he received in 2000). At the assembly line, Curtis set up his work schedule so that he and his colleague would each work 30 minutes before alternating. Curtis would then use his "free" time to read novels and combat his boredom by writing while on the job. After working a series of other low-paying jobs, Curtis took the year off from working in 1993 to focus on writing what would eventually become *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. For this debut novel, Curtis won a Newbury Honor Award in 1996. More books followed, as well as more honors and literary awards such as the Coretta Scott King Award for his next novel, *Bud, Not Buddy*. Curtis remains a prolific writer and continues to write historical fiction with young African American protagonists for a young adult audience. He currently resides in Ontario, Canada, with his children and wife.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The events of *Bud, Not Buddy* take place in 1936 during the worst economic crisis in U.S history: the Great Depression. It began with the stock market crash of 1929 in which millions of people lost their investments. It was followed by sharp declines in consumer spending and investment, which led to a decline in Gross Domestic Product (economic output) and a consequent decline in employment as companies reacted by laying off workers. At its worst, about 15 million Americans were unemployed and about half of America's banks had failed. Makeshift towns called "Hooverilles," like the one in *Bud, Not Buddy*, sprung up all over the country as a response to the subsequent surge in homelessness. They were shanty towns, named after President Hoover, that the homeless constructed mostly out of crates, cardboard, and scrap metal. Many of these communities were concentrated around soup kitchens so those

living there could have access to meals. The economy recovered in the 1940s thanks in large part to military spending, and many of these temporary settlements were destroyed after.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 was Curtis's first book. It won him critical acclaim as well as the Golden Kite Award, A Newbury Honor, and a Coretta Scott King honor. Like *Bud, Not Buddy*, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* is a work of historical fiction told from the perspective of a 10-year-old African American boy. While Bud's experiences happen within the economic instability of the Great Depression, the Watsons have to navigate the American South during the Civil Rights Movement and in the aftermath of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing that happened in Birmingham in 1963. Many of the themes that *Bud, Not Buddy* deals with are also present in the novel, such as race, home, and community. Both novels are coming of age stories about a young African American boy learning about the world as he learns about himself. Unsurprisingly many of Curtis's works are told from the vantage point of a young African American boy; another noteworthy work, Newbury Honor book, and Coretta Scott King winner is *Elijah of Buxton*, which Curtis wrote in 2007. Another work of historical fiction, the book follows an 11-year-old boy who is the first freed person born in a refugee camp made up of former runaway slaves in Brixton Canada. In 2012, Curtis also published *The Mighty Miss Malone*, a book about the character Deza Malone (who first appeared in *Bud, Not Buddy*), her family, and her experiences navigating the uncertain times of the Great Depression.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Bud, Not Buddy*
- **When Written:** 1998
- **Where Written:** Flint, Michigan
- **When Published:** 1999
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction
- **Setting:** Flint, Michigan
- **Climax:** Herman C. Calloway realizes that Bud's mother is his late daughter, and Bud is his grandson.
- **Antagonist:** The Amoses
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Character Inspirations. Lucky Lewis and Herman C. Calloway in *Bud, Not Buddy* are based on Curtis's two grandfathers. Curtis has stated that he wished he talked to them and listened to their stories more when they were alive.

Top Three. Curtis has stated that his three favorite writers are Mark Twain, Zora Neale Hurston, and Toni Morrison. His favorite of the three changes depending on what day he's asked and the mood he's in.



PLOT SUMMARY

A caseworker arrives at Bud Caldwell's orphanage, the **Home**, and tells him and a boy named Jerry Clark that they have both been assigned to new foster homes. The woman tells Bud about his new home with the Amoses and their 12-year-old son. Bud feels sad but doesn't cry at the news that he is going to his third foster home because his eyes "don't cry no more." Bud prepares his **suitcase** for the journey by first making sure everything is in it, especially the **flyers** for a band called "Herman E. Calloway and the Dusky Devastators of the Depression!!!!!!" Bud believes that the man in the blurry picture on the flyer is his father. He also reveals that shortly after his mother brought the last flyer home, he found her dead.

At the Amoses' house, Todd Amos and Bud fight. When Mrs. Amos interrupts the fight, she believes Todd's story that Bud started the whole thing, though Todd is actually the one who started it by pushing a pencil in Bud's nose and calling him "Buddy" instead of Bud, which is something Bud hates. Mrs. Amos consoles Todd who pretends Bud has really hurt him, so Mrs. Amos tells Bud that she will take him back to the Home in the morning and that he will have to sleep in the shed that night. She also refuses to give him back his suitcase to make sure he doesn't steal anything before he leaves. Bud apologizes to them, though he doesn't mean it, before Mr. Amos takes him to the shed.

Mr. Amos puts Bud in the shed and locks it. Eventually he spreads a blanket and takes a nap. When he wakes up from his nap, he is frightened by what he thinks is a vampire bat and tries to kill it with a rake. However, Bud realizes too late that the bat is really a hornet's nest. He tries to escape using the door, but in the process, he is stung multiple times and gets cut on fish heads. Eventually, Bud escapes using the window and decides that he is going to get his revenge. After sneaking back into the Amoses' house, Bud finds his suitcase and puts it on the porch so that he can make a quick getaway. Then he hides the family's gun and uses warm water to make Todd wet the bed. After, he takes his suitcase and goes "on the lam," noting that he is in "serious hot water."

Bud walks towards the library, looking for help from Miss Hill,

the librarian. By the time he gets there, however, the library is closed, and he has to sleep outside on his blanket below a tree. Bud rifles through his suitcase to make sure the Amoses haven't taken anything out of it. Satisfied, he ties up his suitcase and goes to sleep. In the morning, he runs to the mission for breakfast, but he is too late—the line has closed. Bud tries to plead his way into the line, but the guard threatens him. Suddenly a man grabs Bud from behind, refers to him as Clarence, and tells him to join his mother in line. Bud looks to see that his "mother" is a woman already standing in line with two kids, motioning for him to join her. Bud does as he's told and is grateful to have their help to get breakfast. He refers to them as his "pretend parents."

Later, Bud goes back to the library and looks for Miss Hill. Eventually Bud asks another librarian about her, but the librarian tells him that Miss Hill has recently gotten married and moved to Chicago, Illinois. Bud asks how far it would take to walk there, and the librarian responds that it would take 54 hours. However, Bud remains optimistic and returns to sleeping outside next to the tree.

The next day Bud wakes up, alert, sure that someone is watching him as he sleeps. He quickly realizes it is Bugs, his friend from the Home. Bugs asks Bud if he wants to take a train out West with him. Bud quickly agrees and begins to think of Bugs as a brother. They decide to go to "Hooperville" to catch the train. When they get to Hooperville, they realize it is made of makeshift homes and that it is actually called Hooverville. The people of Hooverville take Bugs and Bud in and give them food in return for their help with cleaning up. Bud, Bugs, another boy, and a girl named Deza Malone wash dishes after dinner. Deza gets Bud to open up about his mother and afterwards, they kiss. Before falling asleep, later Bud wonders whether he should go West after all, given that he has a better chance of finding his family in Flint.

Later, Bugs wakes Bud up and tells him that they have to hurry to catch the train. Bud almost forgets his suitcase, so he runs back for it, though in the process, he is separated from Bugs. Bud runs with the other inhabitants of Hooverville to the train but the cops stop them from getting on the train. As more people join the crowd waiting to get on the train, however, many of the cops give up. The Hooverville residents then try to get on the train. Bugs is successful, and though Bud tries to catch up with him, he is unable to. Bud returns to Hooverville just in time to see some cops destroy it. He takes the day's failures as a sign that he should stay put in Flint for the time being. Bud wants to look for Deza, but decides to go to the mission and get breakfast instead.

After, Bud returns to the library and asks for a book to calculate distance between places. He then calculates he'll have to walk for 24 hours to make it to Grand Rapids and decides to do most of his walking at night. That night, though, someone spots Bud when he fails to hide adequately along the side of the road. The

man pulls over and coaxes Bud to come out of his hiding place with the promise of a sandwich and soda. Bud gives the man his name and tells him he's running away from home. The man asks more questions and Bud lies that "home," is Grand Rapids in the hopes that the man will put him on a bus there. Instead, the man tells Bud he'll give him a ride there. He leads Bud to the car, and Bud sees a box containing the words: "URGENT: CONTAINS HUMAN BLOOD!!!" Bud believes the man is a vampire and tries to escape by locking him out of the car and driving away. Bud is unable to drive the car for long, however, so the man catches up to him on foot and explains that the blood is for a hospital. The man tells Bud that his name is Lefty Lewis, and Bud falls asleep in the car.

Bud wakes up a woman's voice. As he listens to the woman complain about Bud's physical state to her "poppa," Bud realizes that she is Lefty's daughter. When Bud opens his eyes, she introduces herself as Mrs. Sleet. Bud has breakfast with Mrs. Sleet, her two children (Kim and Scott) and Lefty. Then he and Lefty embark for Grand Rapids.

When they get to Grand Rapids, Bud pretends to go into his "father's" club, the Log Cabin, before coming out and telling Lefty that his father told him to say thank you for bringing him. Satisfied, Lefty leaves, and Bud enters the club for real this time. Bud sees six men in a circle and listens to one of them tell a story for some time before Bud makes himself known, convinced that the one speaking is his father. He walks toward the man talking and is surprised by how old he is.

Bud announces that the man speaking, Herman, is his father. Everyone, including Herman, is confused, but Bud continues to insist. Eventually a bandmember named Jimmy tells Bud to wait while they talk, and Bud wonders if he has to plan a quick getaway. Soon after, however, Jimmy calls him back and tells Bud that he'll come with them for dinner at a restaurant called Sweet Pea, but only if he promises explain everything to them and tell the truth. After, Bud meets the rest of the band: the Thug, Dirty Deed, Doo-Doo Bug, and Steady Eddie. The band consoles Bud about his "mean old coot" of a father and make him feel welcome.

At Sweet Pea, Bud meets Miss Thomas, the vocal stylist for the band. Bud explains to Miss Thomas that his mother died four years ago and insists again that Herman is his father. Meanwhile, Tyla, the waitress comes to take their order and soon after, Bud enjoys the best meal he's ever had. As he laughs and listens to stories with Miss Thomas, Steady Eddie, and Jimmy at the table, while the other members of the band sit silently with Herman E. Calloway, Bud realizes that he is right where he belongs and starts to cry. Bud is embarrassed, but Miss Thomas pulls him on to her lap consoles him.

Later Miss Thomas brings Bud to "Grand Calloway Station," the band's house. Miss Thomas takes Bud to where he'll be sleeping. He soon finds out that the room belongs to a girl that is "gone," which Bud takes to mean that she is dead. Herman

angrily enters the room soon after and locks the closet doors so Bud can't snoop through the contents of the room or steal anything. Bud is annoyed by the suggestions that he's a thief, when there isn't anything to steal in the first place. Bud soon falls asleep to what he thinks is the sound of his mother's voice and realizes that "nothing could hurt him now."

When Bud wakes up at noon, he overhears Herman tell Miss Thomas that he's going to get Bud's true story from Flint. Miss Thomas soon invites Bud to stay with the band for a while but cautions him that he'll have to pull his weight. Steady Eddie gifts Bud with an old saxophone case and a flute. After, the bandmembers (sans Herman and Miss Thomas) help Bud choose his band name: Sleepy LaBone.

Bud begins to accompany the band on their travels. On their way back from one such trip, Bud has to ride with Herman. Before they depart, Bud sees Herman pick up a rock. Herman tells Bud it's a habit and shows him more rocks in his car with writing on it. Bud tells him he has rocks just like those ones, but Herman doesn't believe him. When they get back to the house, Bud takes similar rocks from his suitcase to show Herman, and Herman angrily demands where he got them from. Jimmy tries unsuccessfully to pacify Herman. Bud shouts that the rocks belong to his mother, Angela Janet Caldwell. Speechless, Herman stumbles inside. Jimmy reveals to Bud that that was the name of Herman's daughter, so Herman may be Bud's grandfather, not his father, after all.

Later, Jimmy and Miss Thomas ask Bud questions about his mother. Bud goes to get his picture of her from his suitcase and sees Herman crying in his room. Herman tries to apologize to him through his tears so Bud consoles him before leaving. Bud then shows Miss Thomas and Jimmy the picture, and they confirm that Bud's mother is Herman's daughter. Bud also realizes the room he's staying in was really his Momma's room. Miss Thomas explains that Herman and Bud's mother had a turbulent relationship.

Miss Thomas gives Bud another picture of his mother to keep. When Miss Thomas and Jimmy go upstairs to see Herman, the rest of the band come in. They give him a new gift: a used saxophone. Bud takes the saxophone upstairs with the pictures of his mother. He puts the flyers and bag of rocks (minus the one that says Flint in Herman's room), and hangs the picture of his mother on the wall of her old room. Then he closes his eyes and excitedly begins to practice.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Bud Caldwell – Bud Caldwell, who is christened "Sleepy LaBone" towards the end of the story, is the protagonist of *Bud, Not Buddy*. He is a resourceful, intelligent, and optimistic African American boy who has spent the last several years in an

orphanage (which he calls **the Home**) and being shifted from foster home to foster home in Flint, Michigan. Despite losing his mother four years ago when he was just six years old, Bud remains optimistic that a new and better “door” is just around the corner for him to open. More than anything else, Bud wants a home and a family. It is what inspires him to leave the foster care system and run away from Flint to Grand Rapids. In the process, he learns to trust in the casual kindness of the strangers he meets on his way (like Lefty Lewis) and be open to being part of a community, like the one he finds in Hooverville with Deza Malone. The thing that keeps Bud going is his love for his mother, whom he refers to as Momma. His memories of her and the things of hers he’s collected in his **suitcase** all serve as a reminder and a hope for himself: that he was once loved and that one day someone will love him again. This is because the suitcase, in addition to carrying his mother’s things, carries **flyers** of a band he believes belongs to the man he thinks is his father: Herman E. Calloway. This hope of his father existing out there gives Bud the courage to look for him and make his dreams of having a family a reality. However, he soon discovers that family can take all sorts of different forms—his mother was Herman’s long-lost daughter, which makes Herman Bud’s grandfather, not his father, and the other members of the band aren’t related to Bud at all but become as fierce a family as any. Though it takes a while to win over Herman, Bud ultimately earns a place in the band (The Dusky Devastators of the Depression/Nubian Knights) and a home at last.

Herman E. Calloway – Herman E. Calloway is the grandfather of Bud Caldwell and the estranged father of Bud’s mother, Angela Janet Caldwell. Herman is the band leader of the Dusky Devastators of the Depression/Nubian Knights. He has a volatile relationship with most people in the story, especially his late daughter and long-lost grandson. Herman is often set in his ways and does not want to entertain any opinions that go against him. Most notably, he takes Bud’s insistence that he is Herman’s son as a challenge and vows to find out the truth. While everyone else gives a measured response to Bud’s sudden appearance that later turns into acceptance, Herman continually rejects Bud and often treats his presence as an inconvenience at best and a nuisance at worst. He is also a perfectionist and demands the absolute best from everyone around him, including his band and his family. Nevertheless, Herman is a deeply sensitive man and truly cares about the people in his life. His grumpy, closed-off demeanor begins to unravel towards the end of the novel when Bud reveals to him that his daughter—Bud’s mother—is dead, and that Bud is the man’s grandson. It is a sobering moment for Herman who realizes that he was much too hard on his daughter during her life, and that he has made the mistake of pushing the people closest to him away by pushing them too hard. In the end when he apologizes to Bud, it is a sign that he is beginning to change and accept the things and people he can’t control.

Momma / Angela Janet Caldwell – Momma is Bud Caldwell’s late mother and Herman E. Calloway’s late daughter. Though Momma is dead at the outset of the novel—she died four years prior, when Bud was only six years old—Bud’s memories of her continue to bring him joy, comfort, and strength during his most trying times. Bud believes he carries her inside of him and inside of his **suitcase**, which is filled with objects that remind him of her. In lieu of a home and a family, Bud’s suitcase and his memories of Momma are what give him the courage to find the man he believes to be his father (Herman) and find the strength to survive on the run from Flint’s oppressive foster care system. In a way, it is Momma’s **flyers**, which depict Herman and his band mates, that help Bud decide to look for Herman E. Calloway in the first place and thus find a new family in the process. Even though she’s long since passed, Momma continues to have a role in bringing and keeping people together. At the end of the novel, her shared relationship between Bud and Herman E. Calloway help them to make some strides in their fractured relationship. Bud remains close to her to the end; he ends up moving permanently into her childhood home and room and continues to revisit her words to him about new doors “opening” as he begins a new stage of his life with his new family.

Miss Thomas – Miss Thomas is the singer in Herman E. Calloway’s band, though she prefers to be called a vocal stylist. She is kind, beautiful, and one of Bud’s fiercest advocates. Bud adores her in return and thinks she has one of the most beautiful voices he has ever heard. Miss Thomas almost immediately shows concern for Bud when she meets him for the first time at Sweet Pea. Though at first, like the others, she doesn’t believe that Herman is Bud’s father, she still believes Bud is a blessing in their lives. She carves out space for Bud in their lives and is one of the reasons he is invited to stay with them at the Grand Calloway Station and enjoy a room to himself. While Miss Thomas and Herman don’t always see eye to eye, she never backs down during their arguments about Bud. Moreover, she always compensates for Herman’s poor behavior by making Bud feel especially welcome and happy with the band. While Miss Thomas does not replace Momma for Bud, she certainly becomes a maternal figure for him, tucking him in at night and making sure all of his needs are met. Miss Thomas is also pivotal in the story because it is through her (and Jimmy) that Bud learns more about his mother and discovers that Herman E. Calloway is his grandfather, not his father.

Lefty Lewis – Mrs. Sleet’s father. Lefty Lewis finds Bud Caldwell on the side of the road on the way from Grand Rapids from Flint and immediately shows concern for the boy. He feeds Bud and asks him questions about where he’s from before deciding shortly after to personally bring him to Grand Rapids. Lefty Lewis is a funny, good-hearted, and kind man who appears to find genuine satisfaction in helping Bud to his

destination. He has a penchant for lightheartedly poking fun at the people around him; he teases Bud during their car trips, as well as his daughter and his grandchildren, Kim and Scott Sleet. Lefty is also someone who believes in causes and is willing to take risks. He helps illegally print flyers for the labor organizing movement, daring to do his part to help suffering workers. It is Lefty's trust, concern, and compassion for others that spur him care for Bud temporarily and deliver him to Herman E. Calloway. He's also a large part of why Bud does successfully find Herman—without Lefty, Bud would have had to walk for 24 hours to Grand Rapids. Thus, accepting Lefty's help is another example of Bud finding comfort and care from strangers and learning to trust adults a little more.

Bugs – Bugs is Bud Caldwell's best friend at the **Home**. Everyone calls him Bugs because of an unfortunate incident involving a cockroach that got stuck in his ear. Bugs, like Bud, is looking to escape Flint and free himself of his orphan status. He recruits Bud to leave Flint with him on a train heading west. Through their planning, Bud begins to think of Bugs as his brother, highlighting the growing importance of chosen family in Bud's life. The two boys run away together and discover a community of people in Hooverville who are also looking to make a better life for themselves with what little they have. Though Bugs is able to get on the train and Bud isn't, Bud is able to get a taste of what it means to have a family through Bugs's companionship.

Steady Eddie – Steady Eddie is the saxophone player in Herman's band. He takes Bud under his wing and is the one to give Bud his first instrument, a flute, as well as his old saxophone case for Bud to put his things in. Bud's switch from his **suitcase** to Eddie's saxophone case hints at the growing trust between the two eventual "band mates," as Bud shows that he is willing to give up some parts of his old life that he looked to for stability for the promise of a new life with Eddie and his new family. Towards the end, Eddie and the other members of the band give Bud his very own "baby" saxophone, again solidifying Bud's place among them and showing their commitment to teaching him and guiding him through life like a family would. Eddie also promises to give Bud saxophone lessons, cementing their growing friendship and closeness with this promise. Bud gladly accepts the proposition and the chance to follow in Eddie's footsteps by mastering the saxophone and becoming a contributing part of their musical family.

Jimmy – Jimmy is one of the band members and one of Herman E. Calloway's closest friends. He is the one who invites Bud Caldwell to go out to eat with the band after Herman denies that Bud is his son, and he is also the one who oftentimes diffuses some tense moments between Herman and Bud. Moreover, along with Miss Thomas, he is the one who explains Bud's mother's relationship to Herman. He is also the one who breaks the news to Bud that Herman isn't his father, but his grandfather—Bud's mother was Herman's daughter. Bud

considers Jimmy, like other members of the band, part of his new family.

Deza Malone – Deza Malone is the young girl that Bud Caldwell meets in Hooverville, whom he shares his first kiss with. She is a very good listener and helps Bud open up about his mother. She is also fiercely loyal to her family and remains optimistic about being eventually reunited with her father, who is away looking for job opportunities in the West.

Pretend Parents – Bud Caldwell's "pretend momma" and "pretend poppa" are two kindly strangers who save him from a beating from the mission's security guard and ensure that Bud can have a meal. They invite Bud to eat with them by temporarily welcoming him into their fold, and although Bud is hesitant to accept help from strangers, he eventually plays along and pretends to be part of the family. They even share some of their brown sugar with him, a huge luxury for Bud. Though Bud interacts with his pretend parents for only a little while, he is grateful for their empathy.

Mrs. Sleet – Lefty Lewis's daughter and the mother of Kim and Scott Sleet. She is the first person Bud hears when he wakes up after getting a ride from Lefty Lewis. She is very concerned with Bud's appearance when her father brings Bud into her home in Flint. She also has little patience for her father's constant teasing and mocking. Regardless, she treats Bud to new clothes and a hot breakfast before her father and Bud get back on the road to Grand Rapids.

Mrs. Amos – Todd's mother and Mr. Amos's husband. The Amoses, a middle-class family, are Bud Caldwell's third foster family. Mrs. Amos dismisses her son's blatant physical abuse—she watches Todd beat up Bud but still accuses Bud of beating up her son—and treats Bud cruelly by taking his **suitcase** and having her husband lock him in a shed. The Amoses are a large part of the reason that Bud decides to run away from Flint, as their cruelty makes him all the more determined to find a real person or family that wants him.

Todd Amos – Todd Amos is the only son of Mr. Amos and Mrs. Amos. He is 12 years old and a constant bully to Bud Caldwell during his short time in the Amoses' household. He is a lying, mean spirited, and physically abusive boy who appears to always get his way. He is one of the reasons the Amoses take Bud's **suitcase** and lock him in the shed for a night.

Dirty Deed – The trombone player in Herman's band. He is also the only white member of the band, and the Log Cabin, Herman's club, is in his name because it is illegal for Herman as a black man to own property in this particular area. Dirty Deed gives Bud a taste of the hardships that his grandfather faces as a black man.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Thug – The drummer in Herman's band. He loves to crack jokes and make fun of Bud Caldwell and the other members of

the band.

Mr. Amos – Todd’s father and Mrs. Amos’s husband. He goes along with his wife’s cruelty and locks Bud in the shed.

Kim Sleet – Mrs. Sleet’s daughter and Scott Sleet’s sister. Kim and Scott are Lefty Lewis’s “favorite”—and *only*—grandchildren. She takes interest in Bud’s story and asks him questions about his mother and his life during breakfast at Mrs. Sleet’s house.

Scott Sleet – Mrs. Sleet’s son, Kim Sleet’s brother, and one of Lefty Lewis’s “favorite” grandchildren.

Doo Doo Bug – The trombone player in Herman’s band.

Tyla – The waitress at Sweet Pea, where Jimmy and the other bandmembers take Bud for a meal. Steady Eddie and Tyla have a close (likely romantic) relationship.

Jerry Clark – Another boy at the **Home**. At the beginning of the novel, he and Bud Caldwell are both sent to live in new foster homes. Although Bud can’t bring himself to cry, Jerry does shed some tears, and Bud comforts him.

Mouth-Organ Man – A man that Bugs and Bud meet in Hooverville, a shanty town made out of cardboard and crates. He invites the boys to stick around and eat a meal, as long as they help out with cleanup duty.

Miss Hill – Bud’s favorite librarian who moves to Chicago with her new husband before Bud has a chance to ask her for help while he’s running away.

The Librarian – A kindly librarian who helps Bud when he’s looking for maps. She informs him of Miss Hill’s recent move and also tells him that she remembers when he and his Momma used to visit the library years ago.

The Caseworker – The woman who comes to **the Home** to inform Bud and Jerry Clark that they’ve both been placed in new foster homes.

TERMS

Mission – The “mission” is what **Bud Caldwell** refers to the soup kitchen in Flint, Michigan. Missions are often started by religious groups and are intended to serve people in need and convert them to a certain faith, though missions can also be secular in nature (usually called “rescue missions”) and are meant to help people in need after a disaster.

Hooverville – Hooverville (which **Bud** mistakenly calls “Hooperville”) was the name for the shanty towns that popped up during the Great Depression as a response to the economic insecurity. Homeless people usually created the houses in Hooverville out of materials like crates and cardboard.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



ECONOMIC INSECURITY AND COMMUNITY

Bud, Not Buddy, a novel by Christopher Paul Curtis, is the story of a 10-year-old orphan named Bud

Caldwell who must fend for himself after he flees his hometown of Flint, Michigan, in search of the man he believes to be his father, Herman E. Calloway. Carrying nothing but mementos of his dead mother, Momma, in a raggedy **suitcase**, Bud rejects the abusive care of the Amoses, the foster parents that the **Home**, Bud’s orphanage, places him with. Instead, Bud takes his chances taking care of himself on the road during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Despite the uncertainties of the time period, Bud finds help in the most unlikely places from the most unlikely people. For instance, through his time with his “pretend parents” at the mission and his time in Hooverville amongst men and women from different walks of life, united by the goal of surviving the hard and financially troubling times they are all in, Bud finds a defense to the economic turmoil. Consequently, Curtis suggests that economic insecurity is *the* great unifier in this novel. It minimizes the differences among strangers so that people are more open to realizing what they have in common with each other—even with a 10-year-old orphan on the run—rather than what makes them different. Moreover, Curtis proves that the absence of economic security can force even the most distrusting of people to find the courage to lean on strangers as a buffer against financial uncertainties.

One of the best examples of the unifying possibilities of shared economic hardships happens when Bud meets his “pretend poppa” and “pretend momma” for the first time, while in line for food at the mission. In the moment, Bud has to make a quick decision between trusting an unknown adult and going hungry. Bud, used to being self-sufficient, initially resists the help of his “pretend poppa.” When the man attempts to rescue him from leaving the mission without food—after a guard threatens Bud—by pretending that Bud is his son, Bud almost ruins the plan by telling the man that “[his] name’s not Clarence.” Bud’s distrust of strangers comes out and he reacts, without thinking, by rejecting the man’s “giant warm hand [...] around [his] neck from behind,” and with it, the man’s pretense of knowing Bud in an intimate way. The man, however, does not give in to Bud’s resistance; he shakes his head to keep Bud quiet and shoves Bud towards his wife with a firm rebuke to “get back in line with

your momma.” His actions suggest to Bud that, whether he likes it or not, they are all in this together, at least in this one moment. If it means Bud has to temporarily join his family to eat at a time when the next meal isn’t promised, then so be it. As a result, Bud finally consents to playing along with his pretend parents, even admitting to himself that he “was grateful to these people.” He ultimately chooses to have faith in strangers rather than to starve. In short, Bud realizes he cannot survive an empty stomach *and* an uncertain future without the help of people willing to be his “pretend” guardians. Consequently, he agrees to forge a bond with the strangers because of their shared economic hardship, which in that moment, overrides any differences they have.

Bud’s realization deepens when he meets the multiracial and economically displaced folks in Hooverville, while he is on his way to the “West” with his friend Bugs. It is there that he is able to see the unifying potential of economic turmoil firsthand. Upon entering Hooverville, a man simply known as the “mouth organ player” welcomes Bud by asking him if he’s hungry, tired, and “scared about what’s going to happen tomorrow.” Bud mostly agrees that he is all of these things, so the player responds that “any place where there’re other folks in need of the same things that [Bud is] is the right place to be.” Bud takes in the man’s words and looks around him and sees firsthand that economic turmoil can have the power to both displace and create bonds that go beyond age, shape, size, and of course color. He notices that the people of Hooverville enjoying dinner around the bonfire, for example, “were all colors you could think of, black, white and brown, [though] the fire made everyone look like they were different shades of orange.” Hooverville, on first glance, then becomes a sort of Utopia for the disadvantaged, the downtrodden, and the poor to commiserate and unite over their shared hardships while dismissing their differences. Though Bud is the town’s newest resident, it doesn’t take long until he internalizes the spirit and unity of Hooverville, so much that he is able to let his guard down, make a new friend, and share his first kiss with Deza Malone, a young girl he meets in Hooverville.

Consequently, Bud comes to realize that his experiences are to some degree shared by a community of people who are understanding of his plight and want to share what little they have with him. Thus, he survives navigating poverty, homelessness, and isolation through the help of the strangers, communities, and families he meets on his journey. Though his encounters with them are fleeting, they remind Bud that he is not alone for daring to survive in their uncertain times.



CHILDREN VS. ADULTS

Bud, Not Buddy follows the perspective of 10-year-old Bud Caldwell as he navigates the world of adults armed only with his **suitcase** and list of rules he created himself. As an orphan on the run, Bud appears to

have a tense relationship with adults, whom he frequently views skeptically. Oftentimes he relies on his rules, “Bud Caldwell’s Rules and Things to Have a Funner Life and Make a Better Liar Out of Yourself;” to outsmart adults, to find out more information about them than they would otherwise be willing to share, and to build a database of solutions for the problems adults throw at him. These rules operate as Bud’s guardian, in absence of a true parental figure, and give him advice on the best course of action to take when interacting with an adult. Bud even at one point refers to himself as “just about a man,” or on the cusp of manhood, suggesting that his knowledge of the adult world puts him on the same footing as adults despite his age. Curtis suggests that Bud’s innocent and nascent curiosity and understanding of the world of “grown folks” is what he uses to fill the hole left by his mother. By raising himself with his own rules and using those guiding principles to stand up to adults and hold his own, Bud attempts to prove to himself and others that he can raise himself better than any living adult can. Thus, Curtis suggests that Bud’s rules are a defense mechanism, a way of feeling his mother’s absence less while dealing with his constantly changing circumstances.

Bud’s ability to use his rules to navigate the adult world is on full display when he outsmarts the Amoses and ensures that they’ll “punish” him by sending him back to the **Home**, which is what he secretly wants. With a clever appeal to reverse psychology, Bud responds to their threats to send him back to the Home by begging them to “give [him] another chance [...] [to] do a whole lot better,” despite the fact that “going back to the Home was just what [he] wanted to do.” While on the surface it looks like the Amoses are the ones making the decision, it is really Bud calling the shots from behind the scenes by manipulating the Amoses, as if *he* is the adult in the encounter. He uses “rule 118” to remind himself that “you have to give adults something that they think they can use to hurt you by taking it away. That way they might not take something away that you really do want.” Thus, he dangles getting sent back to the Home under the Amoses’ nose to ensure that that is exactly what they’ll do to punish him. Here, Bud fully takes on the role of the adult. As a child would turn to a guardian, Bud consults himself and his rules to impart wisdom and to respond to the challenges he faces in the Amoses’ household by applying old rules to new situations.

Bud’s ability to adapt his rules for unpredictable situations comes in handy once again when he falls asleep in Lefty Lewis’s care on their way to Grand Rapids. Rather than panic when he wakes up and doesn’t remember where he is, Bud once again turns to his rules to figure out how to use the situation to his advantage, get information from the adults, and decide the best course of action for himself. Bud wakes up to woman’s voice, but instead of opening his eyes, he pretends that he is asleep. As he pretends, he remembers “rule 29”: “When you wake up and don’t know for sure where you’re at and there’s a bunch of

people standing around you, it's best to pretend you're still asleep until you can figure out what's going on and what you should do." Again, Bud's rules are oriented towards what *he* should do in the situation as if he is the one with the deciding power. He treats the adults in the room as if they are a mere means to an end instead of the ones with the true power. In this way he subtly inverts the child/adult relationship and becomes the authority figure in the room, leaving the true adults who are present, Lefty Lewis and Mrs. Sleet, to sit on the sidelines while he decides for himself what is best. Bud's decision to stay quiet and listen is the reason he is able to find out that Herman E. Calloway was married once before and that Bud may have a sister. Without his mother to impart this information to Bud about his family history, Bud is left with his experiences and his rules to fend for himself, find out the information he needs to survive, and to make the decision to leave Flint for Grand Rapids.

Having been forced to grow up beyond his years in the foster care system, Bud learns how to parent himself better than any adult. As many of the adults in his life have treated him unfairly—particularly the Amoses and former foster parents—becoming the adult in the room becomes a matter of survival. Curtis suggests that if Bud were to relegate jurisdiction over himself to the adults in the room, he would be doomed. For that reason, Bud must hold his own.



RESOURCEFULNESS

Bud, Not Buddy is the story of a 10-year-old African American boy named Bud Caldwell, who as the title suggests, insists on being called Bud instead of

Buddy. Though an orphan on the run from Flint to Grand Rapids, Bud has a strong sense of identity and a keen understanding of what he wants in life, which helps him overcome the biggest and most challenging of obstacles. Bud hatches numerous plans throughout the narrative, some small, others big, all in a quest to outrun situations that don't suit him. His age never seems to hamper his resourcefulness; with the poise of someone much older, Bud's penchant for planning for contingencies oftentimes takes him far. For example, when the toxic environment of the Amoses' household drives him to run away and he has to spend the night under a Christmas tree, he sagely states that "most folks don't have sense enough to carry a blanket around with them, but you never know when you might be sleeping under a Christmas tree at the library so I always keep mine handy." This exemplifies Bud's typical responses to the most trying situations: to have a blanket, or a plan of escape. This knack for being resourceful is what leads Bud to escape the Amoses' shed and how to figure out how to get to Grand Rapids without a driver's license or a guardian. All in all, Bud's resourcefulness is what ensures his resilience, what helps him survive life on the run, and what allows him to stay true to himself and chase down what he wants in life.

Bud's escape from the Amoses' shed is just one example of his ability to use his limited resources to change an outcome for the better. In escaping the shed, Bud simultaneously rejects the Amoses' attempt to reinvent him as an expendable, unwanted orphan. After being unfairly locked in a dark shed by Mr. Amos, Bud must battle fish heads that guard the door, vampire bats, and a hornet's nest, things scary enough for "a normal kid [to] [...] have busted out crying." Instead, these obstacles make Bud all the more determined to break out. At one point during the night, Bud, instead of cowering in fear when he sees a vampire bat, tries to use a rake to kill the bat. He doesn't stop there, however. Bud also takes his "jackknife out of [his] pocket and [pulls] the blade open [so] if [he] didn't kill him with the rake and it came down to the two of [them] tussling on the floor maybe a silver blade in his heart would be just as good as a silver bullet." This way of thinking shows Bud's ability to be quick on his feet in challenging situations that call for sudden action and strategy. His ability to be resourceful is what gives him the courage to use his intuition and skills to attempt to kill the bat and later escape a horde of hornets by breaking through a window. It is no surprise, then, that the adrenaline from the breakout leaves Bud with the determination to never again relive a scenario like the one he is escaping from. He chooses life on the run as a way of exerting control over himself and his life in rejection of the box (or shed) that the world, the [Home](#), and his foster parents have put him in as their ward.

Bud's resourcefulness is again on full display when he figures out how to get from Flint to Grand Rapids to find the man he thinks is his father. His plan to get to Grand Rapids, like his decision to run away, shows his determination to further distance himself from who he is in Flint—Bud, the orphan—and reinvent himself as simply *Bud*. With nothing but an estimate of the distance and the length of time it would take him to walk from Flint to Grand Rapids, Bud hatches a plan. He notes that "it would be easiest to do the night part first, [...] to stick around the library until it got dark, then head for Grand Rapids." Afterwards, he shows off his ability to be thorough in his planning and begins to write "down all the names of all the cities [he'd] have to pass through to get there." Bud's ability to put his plan into motion with detailed care and foresight shows the extent to which he is unsatisfied with the lack of opportunities Flint offers him to live outside the clutches of an abusive foster parents and foster care system.

Ultimately, Bud's plan to make it to Grand Rapids becomes his saving grace, a way for him to both assert his right to a life free of abuse and a way for him to show the world who Bud is without the "orphan" attached to it. As Bud cleverly makes it out of the shed, out of the grasp of Mrs. Amos and Mr. Amos, and out of Flint, his resourcefulness becomes his ticket to a world of more opportunities.



FAMILY AND HOME

Bud, Not Buddy tells the story of the orphaned Bud Caldwell, a young boy who has been living between foster homes and an orphanage since his mother passed away four years ago. While on the surface, Bud's story is about his search for the man he thinks is his father, Herman E. Calloway, and his journey from Flint to Grand Rapids to find him, it is also a story of Bud's search for a family to call his own. Having lost Momma at such an early age, Bud unconsciously looks for a person to do the impossible: to fill the void his mother left. Bud's ambitious goal, unsurprisingly, comes with a few disappointments. He is forced to watch his "new pretend brother"—his friend and fellow orphan, Bugs—go off on a train to Chicago "before [they] could really get to know each other," after their dreams of going West together go awry. Yet despite this and other disappointments, Bud finally finds his place among the members of Herman's band towards the end. It is with tears, despite not crying for years because his "eyes don't cry no more," that Bud accepts his place among the band members of the Dusky Devastators/Nubian Knights, filling the four-year-old hole his mother left in him once and for all. Though Bud starts the journey looking for the man he believes is his father, he ultimately realizes that a community of people who love and care for him unconditionally is worth the same as any blood relative. Thus, Curtis shows that finding a home is not always about blood but is instead about finding a place of love and acceptance.

Deza Malone is one of the first people to fully reveal—even to Bud himself—the emphasis Bud places on family in the absence of a home. During their conversations together, she tells Bud that he's "different" from the other "poor kids on the road all alone." Unlike them, Bud "[carries his] family around inside of [him]." Bud agrees and says, "I guess I do. Inside my **suitcase**, too." This moment reveals that Bud's close relationship with his suitcase is connected to his yearning for a close relationship with his family. The absence of a family leads him to carry his suitcase, full of the mementos from his late mother, as a sign that he belonged *and* belongs with someone, who by blood, has an obligation to create a home for him. After Deza helps him to this realization, he becomes even more set on this limited definition of family and home. Later that night, Bud has the epiphany that "someone who doesn't know who their family is, is like dust blowing around in a story [because] they don't really belong any one place." Bud weaves together the concept of blood, family, and a home to call his own in his mind until they form an unbreakable sequence in Bud's head: if he can find his relative, he can have a family, and thus he can make a home for himself.

It isn't until Bud gets to Grand Rapids that his ideas about families and homes begin to unravel; it is there he recognizes for the first time that he feels most at home not with Herman E. Calloway, the man Bud is supposedly related to, but with

members of Herman's band, despite not having blood ties with any of them. It is at his first dinner with the band, while enjoying the "best meal [he'd] ever had," that Bud realizes that "of all the people he'd ever met these were the ones. This was where [he] was supposed to be." Suddenly home is no longer a place built around shared blood and kinship, but rather a place filled with the people who make Bud feel welcome and accepted. Bud commemorates the moment with tears he hasn't let fall in years: "I was smiling and laughing and busting my gut so much that I got carried away and some rusty old valve squeaked open in me then [...] tears started jumping out of my eyes so hard [...]" The tears mark a change of perspective, a new chapter in Bud's life to share with a family he never predicted he would have. Bud's change of perspective is confirmed when—while Miss Thomas, the band's vocalist, consoles him on her lap—he hears "something [whisper] to [him] in a language that [he] didn't have any trouble understanding." The voice tells Bud to "Go ahead and cry [because he's] home." This final moment suggests that Bud has not only found a new family, but also that the new family is ready to accept and welcome him with open arms. He is part of their home now as much as they are part of his.

Though Bud continues to "[carry his] Momma inside [him] [because] there wasn't anyone or anything that could take away from that or add to it either," he accepts that there are different types of homes, some defined by blood ties, others defined by shared laughs, meals, and goals.



RACE AND RACISM

Orphaned at an early age, Bud has to navigate the world of racial prejudice and inequality that he's coming of age in during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Despite Bud's age, he shows a keen awareness of race and the way it functions in society, such as when he asks Deza Malone why some of the white people in Hooverville were "off alone." Deza answers that it's because they insist that because they're white, they "ain't in need of a handout." This exchange, though brief, reveals that Curtis is interested in keeping race a present shadow in the novel. It is his way of subtly making the reader meditate on the external dangers that Bud faces that he, as a young child, may not fully be aware of. References to race juxtapose with Bud's internal preoccupations and connect the story to America's history with race and racism. For example, the dangers connected to race are present when Lefty Lewis criticizes Bud for traveling late at night by himself, as well as when Steady Eddie tells Bud that Dirty Deed, the only white man in Herman E. Calloway's band, has to have Herman's Log Cabin club in his name for "practical reasons." These instances are Curtis's way of revealing that Bud's coming of age narrative must be accompanied by a strong understanding of the way race works in America. In other words, he suggests that to come of age as a black boy in America, Bud must understand the nuances and dangers of

race.

When Lefty Lewis finds Bud on the side of the road in the middle of the night in the Michigan town of Owosso, he is both surprised and relieved to have found Bud because of the racial threat that hides in the dark. He tries to impart on Bud just how “lucky” it is for Bud that he, “came through here,” because “some of these Owosso folks used to have a sign hanging alone here that said [...] ‘To Our Negro Friends Who Are Passing Through, Kindly Don’t Let The Sun Set On Your Rear End In Owosso.’” Lefty Lewis emphasizes the dangers of the situation by keeping a hand on Bud, anxious that the boy will flee, to show him that in this scenario, the racial danger trumps whatever fears and wariness Bud has for him as a stranger. Bud notices this and notes that “[Lefty] must not have trusted [him] ‘cause he kept holt of my arm.” This tense moment with Lefty teaches Bud to be vigilant of his surroundings as a young black boy in America. Lefty’s blunt admission is a warning to Bud that surviving and maturing in the society they live in requires stealth and awareness of people who may want to hurt him because of his blackness.

Bud gets another lesson on race when Steady Eddie and Dirty Deed let him in on the secret of the Log Cabin’s ownership and how Herman E. Calloway must navigate unfair racist laws to make a living for himself. Like Lefty, Steady Eddie and Dirty Deed explain things bluntly so Bud can begin to understand and internalize the nuances of race in society and how it impacts who can own property. Steady Eddie tells Bud that “Mr. C. always got a white fella in the band, for practical reasons,” while Dirty Deed further explains that because “it’s against the law for a Negro to own any property out where the Log Cabin is [...] Mr. C. put it in [Dirty Deed’s] name.” This moment presents Bud with an opportunity to meditate on how racism functions with the complicity of laws. It is an important conversation that Bud must have in order to fully mature and understand societal barriers he will face as he grows up, but it also shows Bud that, despite beginning to learn and understand the way race works in the country, he doesn’t have to settle for being a second-class citizen—just like Herman E. Calloway.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE HOME

The Home, Bud Caldwell’s name for his orphanage, is the site of many of his worst memories and symbolizes profound isolation and loneliness throughout the novel. It is where he’s forced to live after his mother’s death, and so its name is particularly ironic since it is not a true “home” as much as it is a waiting room or temporary lodging for Bud as

he goes between foster homes. While a home often suggests the place where one can go to feel a sense of familiarity, trust, and love, the Home is quite the opposite. For one, Bud is distrustful of the other children in the Home, evidenced by his insistence on counting and recounting the things in his **suitcase** to make sure everything is accounted for, especially with “more and more kids coming into the Home every day,” and his insistence on sleeping with a jackknife. It is also the place in which Bud’s isolation from a family and people that care for him is the starkest. To belong to the Home means that there is no true home nor family for him to return to.

Bud ultimately rejects the kind of lonely existence that the Home symbolizes. He goes on the run, choosing to take his chances finding a makeshift family for himself instead of allowing himself to accept the inadequate (and sometimes outright abusive) version of a home and a community that the Home gives him. In doing so, Bud realizes that he has the power to redefine what a true home, one built around community, familiarity, should be.



BUD’S SUITCASE

Bud Caldwell’s suitcase very rarely ever leaves his side and symbolizes comfort, guidance, and belonging throughout the novel. In the suitcase, Bud keeps flyers of Herman E. Calloway’s band, his mother’s rocks, a blanket, and a picture of his mother as a child. In many ways, Bud’s suitcase is both his version of a traveling home *and* a traveling parent. It gives him some sense of stability and comfort amidst a very volatile period in his life, characterized by abusive foster parents, homelessness, hunger, and poverty. In carrying a picture of his mother and the rocks that once belonged to her, Bud is able to feel closer to her and feel like somewhere out there, there are people who care about him. Moreover, Bud often turns to his suitcase and its contents for comfort, whenever he needs a blanket to sleep on, needs to remember his “father’s” face, or needs to remind himself of his mother and her stories. Bud only gives his suitcase up—though not its contents—when he finds a place and people he feels like he belongs with. The band gifts bud with a refurbished saxophone case to use in place of his suitcase, symbolizing his newfound place among his newfound family.



THE FLYERS

The flyers that Bud carries around in his **suitcase** symbolize his pursuit of both freedom and belonging—freedom from the foster care system, but belonging in the sense of finding a family and a true home. The flyers, which once belonged to Bud’s late mother, contain information on Herman E. Calloway (whom Bud suspects to be his father) and the many iterations of his band over the years. For Bud, these flyers are an ongoing source of fascination and a tether

to his hope that somewhere out there, he has family he belongs to. This hope persists despite Bud almost losing the flyers during a daring attempt to get on a train heading West with his friend Bugs. To get the flyers, Bud has to forego getting on the train, a moment that shows just how much he prioritizes his hope of belonging to a community and family that will care for him over his desire to leave Flint. That Bud is able to retrieve the flyers helps propel him to take the leap of faith and journey to Grand Rapids to find the man he is convinced is his father. Ultimately, it is the hope symbolized by the flyers that help him find a home and a new family worthy of filling some of the hole his mother left in him when she passed away.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Yearling edition of *Bud, Not Buddy* published in 2002.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ This was the third foster home I was going to and I'm used to packing up and leaving, but it still surprises me that there are always a few seconds, right after they tell you you've got to go, when my nose gets all runny and my throat gets all choky and my eyes get all sting-y. But the tears coming out doesn't happen to me anymore, I don't know when it first happened, but it seems like my eyes don't cry no more.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Bud has just learned that he is being moved to yet another foster home, and as he packs his suitcase, he reflects on how it feels to be shuttled from place to place as an orphan in the foster care system. In this passage, Bud suggests that feels anonymous and expendable, moved around like an object rather than a human being, so he has had to adapt by perfecting the only thing he can control in the situation—his emotional response to his circumstances. He likely learned to stop crying when it became clear that nothing about his situation would change because of the tears. He has also forgotten when he first stopped being able to cry, which suggests that he's been moved around so much that everything has all blurred together.

☞ It's at six that grown folks don't think you're a cute little kid anymore, they talk to you and expect that you understand everything they mean. And you'd best understand too, if you aren't looking for some real trouble, 'cause it's around six that grown folks stop giving you little swats and taps and jump clean up to giving you slugs that'll knock you right down and have you seeing stars in the middle of the day. The first foster home I was in taught me that real quick.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4-5

Explanation and Analysis

As he prepares to leave the Home for his new assignment with the Amos family, Bud reflects on what age one truly grows up. In this passage, Bud hints at some of the abuses he has likely faced under the jurisdiction of the adults in his life. He reveals that he was never able to have a real childhood because he was exposed to so much violence from an early age. Nevertheless, Bud also shows that he is someone who adapts even the worst situations. As his life got more and more violent from the age of six, he reveals that he was able to walk away from it with life lessons that helped him mature beyond his years and face the next foster home and other abusive adults in his life with more strength.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ There comes a time when you're losing a fight that it just doesn't make sense to keep on fighting. It's not that you're being a quitter, it's just that you've got the sense to know when enough is enough.

I was having this thought because Todd Amos was hitting me so hard and fast that I knew that the blood squiring out of my nose was only the beginning of a whole long list of bad things that were about to happen to me.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Todd Amos

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

This passage opens *in media res*, or in the middle of the action, as Bud is now in the midst of life in the Amos household and in the midst of being beaten up by 12-year-old Todd Amos. Immediately after he begins his time with the Amoses, Todd welcomes him by beating him until he is bloody. Bud's reaction shows that though this abusive treatment in a foster home isn't particularly new to him, it doesn't make each violent interaction any less painful. Moreover, the beating convinces Bud that it is an omen of even worse things to come. It is clear that Bud does not expect any adult or guardian to come to his rescue, defend his honor, and nurse him back to health. In fact, he expects the opposite.

☛ RULES AND THINGS NUMBER 118

You have to give adults something that they think they can use to hurt you by taking it away. That way they might not take something away that you really do want. Unless they're crazy or real stupid they won't take everything because if they did they wouldn't have anything to hold over your head to hurt you with later.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Mrs. Amos

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

After being beaten up by Todd, Bud realizes that anywhere is better than being stuck with the abusive Amoses, so he begs the cruel Mrs. Amos *not* to send him back to the Home—knowing she'll do just that, which is exactly what he wants. His behavior in this moment is governed by “rule 118,” which dictates one of Bud's many ways of manipulating adults and speaks to his profound distrust of adults in general. Bud's rules are likely backed by hard-earned experiential wisdom, meaning that he's learned firsthand not to give adults anything that they can use “to hurt you with later.” To avoid this happening again, Bud tricks the Amoses into doing something to punish him (sending him back to the Home) that he actually wants them to do. So in a sense, Bud's rules help him call the shots and give him a way to find solutions that work for him in a world controlled by adults. Bud's rules also reveal his assumption all adults are the same and that all of them are bad, a worldview that will begin to be dismantled through

characters like Lefty Lewis and Miss Thomas.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☛ After while the stings and fish-guard bite quit hurting so much. I started getting madder and madder. I was mad at the Amoses, but most of all I was mad at me for believing there really was a vampire in the shed and for getting trapped like this where there wasn't anybody who cared what happened to me.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Todd Amos, Mr. Amos, Mrs. Amos

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Bud has just freed himself from the hornet-infested shed that the Amoses locked him up in for the night, and his anger begins to boil over. Bud's hunger for revenge reveals that he is done being the victim and will no longer take abuse from the Amoses and the foster care system. He acknowledges that as an orphan, he has to fend for himself because there is no one out there “who care[s] what happen[s] to [him],” but this thought makes him angry rather than sad. Thus, it seems that Bud's need for revenge is really a desire to make all the people like the Amoses who have rejected him pay for their violent and heartless crimes. Moreover, Bud realizes that he, too, is to blame for this situation. All of this heightens Bud's anger, propelling him to act rather than remain passive. By acting, he is wrestling back control of his life from people within the foster care system who don't care about his well-being or even actively want to harm him.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ I can't all the way blame Todd for giving me trouble, though. If I had a regular home with a mother and father, I wouldn't be too happy about other kids living in my house either. Being unhappy about it is one thing but torturing the kids who are there even though they don't want to be is another. It was my job to make sure other kids who didn't know where their mothers and fathers were didn't have to put up with Todd.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Todd Amos

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

As Bud prepares to get even with the Amoses, he reflects on why Todd acts the way that he does. Bud shows his maturity as he considers the root cause of Todd's poor behavior. As much anger as he has for the boy, he also believes that the boy is just defending his place within his family, something Bud desperately wishes he had. However, Bud refuses to let Todd's plans go unpunished because he has to make sure that the orphaned kids that come after him won't be subjected to the same type of torture—after all, Todd has already made it clear that all the kids who came *before* Bud received the same terrible treatment. Bud clearly cares about his community of downtrodden and isolated kids, and as much as he wants to escape, he also wants to make life easier for those that take his place. He sees himself as paving the way for better treatment for children in the foster care system.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ I knew a nervous-looking, stung up kid with blood dripping from a fish-head bite and carrying a old raggedy suitcase didn't look like he belonged around here.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

As Bud flees the Amoses' neighborhood, he realizes how out of place he must look. Even at just 10 years old, Bud is very aware of the concept of belonging. Though in this passage he is referring to how outlandish he looks on the run when he says that he doesn't "belong[] around here," his thoughts still speak to his deeper desire to find a place and people to belong to—not just people who are legally bound to take care of him, but people who will love him and genuinely care about him. Moreover, it is telling that Bud particularly doesn't believe that he belongs around "here," meaning Flint, Michigan. This foreshadows his eventual decision to go to Grand Rapids in order to find his family.

☝ She'd tell me, "Especially don't you ever let anyone call you Buddy, I may have some problems but being stupid isn't one of them. I would've added that *dy* onto the end of your name if I intended for it to be there [...]. Your name is Bud, period."

Related Characters: Momma / Angela Janet Caldwell (speaker), Bud Caldwell

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bud thinks back on a memory of his mother urging him to never let anyone call him "Buddy." Bud's mother resides in a special place in Bud's heart. She is the one who instills great pride in Bud for his name, his identity, and his self-worth. That is why Bud holds his name dearly and protects it. In a way, it is his way of protecting his mother's hopes and ideas for who he will be. In other words, Bud wants to live up to who she intended for him to be, even though she is gone. Thus, whenever Bud defends his name and refuses to be called Buddy, he is in dialogue with his mother. He is telling her that he hasn't forgotten what she taught him before she died and that he is still her son.

☝ "A bud is a flower-to-be. A flower in waiting. Waiting for just the right warmth and care to open up. It's a little fist of love waiting to unfold and be seen by the world. And that's you."

Related Characters: Momma / Angela Janet Caldwell (speaker), Bud Caldwell

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bud thinks about his mother's reasoning for naming him "Bud." Bud's mother makes Bud realize from an early age that he is deserving of love from the world and that he has so much love to give in return—he is "a little fist of love." She also instills in Bud the idea that he is brimming with potential and will do great things when he grows up and "unfold[s]." It is possible that this particular memory helps Bud remain optimistic about finding a family to love him one day, so that, like his mother hinted at, he can "unfold," "be seen by the world," and learn to be a child again. Because he has experienced love from his mother before, it

helps him know what to look for as he pursues it again on the road to find the man he thinks is his father, Herman E. Calloway.

☞ It's funny how now that I'm ten years old and just about a man I can see how Momma was so wrong. She was wrong because she probably should've told me the things she thought I was too young to hear, because now that she's gone I'll never know what they were. Even if I was too young back then I could've rememorized them and used them when I did need help, like right now.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Momma / Angela Janet Caldwell

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bud laments the fact that his mother will never have the chance to tell him certain things about herself, his background, or the world they live in. Bud's reflection in this passage suggests that the pain of Momma's absence hasn't diminished with time. Without his mother's guidance, Bud has had to teach himself about how the world works (hence his many "rules" that he refers to throughout the novel), and that often means learning things the hard way. This makes Bud a little bitter as he admits that he needs help and needs someone to care about him and look after him. He wishes that his mother had told him everything he wanted to know in case she ever left before she got a chance. Of course, she died when Bud was only six years old, so he couldn't possibly have understood everything there was to know.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ I opened my eyes to start looking for Miss Hill. She wasn't at the lending desk, so I left my suitcase with the white lady there. I knew it would be safe.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Miss Hill, The Librarian

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Bud is on a mission to find answers from Miss Hill the librarian, and though he's especially vulnerable since he is currently living without a home outside of the foster care system, he still decides to trust a different librarian—a stranger—with his suitcase without vetting her first. This is very out of character for Bud, as his suitcase is absolutely precious to him and almost never leaves his side. After all, it carries his most important items that belonged to his mother. That Bud decides to trust the librarian may speak to the sense of safety that the library as a whole gives him. However, this passage also seems to suggest that Bud has internalized some racial stereotypes. While Bud tends to view people skeptically especially where his suitcase is concerned, the librarian's whiteness is able to temper some of his fears about people looking through his stuff. He seems to assume that because she is white, she won't rifle through his suitcase and steal any of his precious belongings.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ "I'm sorry, Bud, I didn't mean to scare you, but everybody knows how you like to sleep with that knife open so I figured I'd best grab holt of you so's you wouldn't wake up slicing nobody."

Related Characters: Bugs (speaker), Bud Caldwell

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Bugs has just snuck up on Bud while he was sleeping outside of the library. Bugs reveals how prepared Bud is for bad things to happen to him—even as he sleeps, he holds a knife to defend himself. This again reveals how traumatic of a life Bud has lived at the hands of adults. Bud's decision to sleep with a knife reveals that he has likely never felt safe during the night or while he was sleeping since his mother died. It also suggests that the people whose care he has been in may have tried to hurt him in his sleep—like Todd shoving the pencil all the way up Bud's nose while he was sleeping. Moreover, Bud's forced alertness makes the people in his life, like Bugs, cautious around him lest they become some of Bud's unintentional casualties.

“ I spit a big glob in my hand and said, “We’re brother forever, Bugs!”

We slapped our hands together as hard as we could and got our slob mixed up real good, then waved them in the air so they’d dry. Now it was official, I finally had a brother!

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Bugs

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Bugs and Bud decide to go out West together and catch a train the following day. Bud is clearly excited by Bugs’s plan to run away together, and it seems to be the answer Bud has been looking for. He finally feels as if he has found someone, much like a sibling, who will have his back no matter what. He wants to believe this so badly that he seals his hopes of their siblinghood and their dedication to each other as brothers by creating an intimate ceremony that involves the mixing of each other’s spit as they shake hands. In the absence of a blood relationship, their shared spit seems to work well enough to make them feel bonded to each other on an intimate level.

“ They were all the colors you could think of, black, white and brown, but the fire made everyone look like they were different shades of orange. There were dark orange folks sitting next to medium orange folks sitting next to light orange folks.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bud has just arrived in Hooverville and takes in the scene. He immediately notices just how much Hooverville seems to collapse differences—particularly racial differences—in favor of a diverse community of people that are equally affected by the current economic crisis. Even though Bud just got to Hooverville, he is quickly taken aback by the how the fire makes everyone into a slightly different shade of orange, so that racial differences are harder to make out. Suddenly a place that is meant to be a refuge for the poor becomes a sort of racial utopia where race feels less visible and thus less tangible. The magic of

Hooverville lies in its ability to illuminate what makes people similar to each other—their shared financial hardships—rather than different.

“ My mother said the same thing, that families should be there for each other all the time. She always used to tell me that no matter where I went or what I did that she’d be there for me, even if she wasn’t somewhere that I could see her [...] She would tell me every night before I went to sleep that no matter what happened I could sleep knowing that there had never been a little boy, anywhere, anytime, who was loved more than she loved me. She told me that as long as I remembered that I’d be OK.”

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Momma / Angela Janet Caldwell, Deza Malone

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 72-73

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bud shares his memories of Momma with Deza Malone, a girl around his age that he met in Hooverville. As they scrub dishes together, he reveals that his mother is the one who first instilled in him a strong yearning for a family. Moreover, it is because of her that Bud is unable to give up his desire to have a family again. Bud felt so special in his mother’s presence, so sure of her deep love for him all those years ago, that she continues to be his model for what a familial love feels like. Even though he longs to find another family to belong to, Bud nevertheless believes that his mother continues to live on in him, even though he can’t see her. Though Bud faces many hardships, he often turns to memories of his mother for support, courage, guidance, and comfort.

“ Someone who doesn’t know who their family is, is like dust blowing around in a storm, they don’t really belong any one place [...] I might not know who my family was, but I knew they were out there somewhere, and it seemed to make a whole lot more sense to think that they were somewhere around Flint instead of out west.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Momma / Angela Janet Caldwell, Deza Malone

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bud realizes that without a family, nothing tethers him to one place. Bud decides that that is no way for him to live—he doesn't want to be “dust blowing around in a storm” but be rooted in one place, tied down by people who love him. He feels that he deserves a family, deserves to be cared for, and deserves belong somewhere. As he considers his plans to take a train out West with Bugs the next day, Bud begins to think that perhaps this hope of “belonging” is more attainable the closer he stays to his place of birth. After all, it is closer to his mother, the person who provides him with the most strength even from the grave.

☛ The train and my new pretend brother got farther and farther away, chugging to Chicago. Man. I'd found some family and he was gone before we could really get to know each other.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Bugs

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Bud has just missed the train headed West. While Bud was busy chasing down the flyer that he had accidentally left behind, Bugs made it safely onto the train, and now the boys are separated for good. As the train speeds away, Bud is forced to abandon his ideas of having a brother who has his back at every moment. It is a sobering realization for Bud, who now must deal again with the isolation and sadness that comes with losing someone he has grown to depend on. More than anything else, a family is what Bud wants out of life. So to find it briefly with Bugs and then see it disappear in the blink of an eye on a train heading “farther and farther away,” makes Bud feel as if he may never find a stable family or place of his own.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☛ “The people who run factories and the railroads seemed to be really scared. To them if a worker has any dignity or pride he can't be doing a good job.”

Related Characters: Lefty Lewis (speaker), Bud Caldwell

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lefty and Bud are in the car together, and Lefty is explaining labor unions to Bud. Economic insecurity is a big issue throughout most of Bud's journey. The more Bud travels, the more he realizes that though his life is difficult, his struggles with food deprivation, homelessness, and hardship are not unique to him. In fact, these issues appear to be affecting huge groups of people around the country in varying ways. Here, Lefty tries to imprint on Bud that while the Depression is ravaging the livelihoods of most of the country, people are doing their best to fight back, which is getting the attention of the people in power. This is a huge life lesson for Bud who must grapple with the fact that his struggle is connected to the struggle of workers around the country as well.

☛ I knew if I was a regular kid I'd be crying buckets of tears now, I didn't want these men to think I was a baby, so I was real glad that my eyes don't cry no more. My nose plugged up and a little growl came out of my mouth but I kept my finger pointed, cleared my throat and said, “I know it's you.”

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Herman E. Calloway

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bud confronts Herman, the man he thinks is his father, for the first time. Bud does not think he is a regular kid because of the amount of abuse he has been forced to endure from such an early age. For that reason, he finds it especially difficult to be vulnerable around adults—especially adults who have power over him—lest they decide to take advantage of him. Regardless of how Bud got so tough, his ability to stand up for himself is what gives him the courage to announce, in a room full of grown men, that Herman is his father. Even when the fear of how the men will react threatens to make him not go through with his plan, Bud is able to push through and remain strong

in his convictions—proving in the process that he can take any adult on despite his size and age.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ I was smiling and laughing and busting my gut so much that I got carried away and some rusty old valve squeaked open in me then...woop, zoop, sloop...tears started jumping out of my eyes so hard that I had to cover my face with the big red and white napkin that was on the table.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

While having dinner at a restaurant with the band, Bud suddenly breaks down emotionally. Though Bud is usually very tough, he is unable to resist the urge to cry when he realizes that he genuinely feels at home with the band in a way that he has never felt since his mother died. Bud is embarrassed by his rush of emotions, especially since he enjoys remaining tough in the presence of adults, but he is unable to stop. The tears, however, are not sad tears but happy ones. It is as if Bud truly understand just how long of a journey it has taken for him to find a place to belong to and people to belong with. Moreover, Bud is both crying for all the past traumas and violence he never allowed himself to react properly to and for the new familial love he has found with the band and Miss Thomas.

☝☝ I wasn't sure if it was her lips or her hand, but something whispered to me in a language that I didn't have any trouble understanding, it said, "Go ahead and cry, Bud, you're home."

Related Characters: Miss Thomas, Bud Caldwell (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Miss Thomas, one of Bud's biggest advocates, makes Bud feel as if he is strong for crying instead of weak. Unlike other adults, she does not take advantage of Bud's show of vulnerability. Instead she surrounds him with comfort and

lets him know that it is okay to cry and have people he trusts comfort him. Moreover, by letting him cry she encourages him to be a child in the moment and let go of some of the baggage that he has been carrying. Whether she says it verbally or just through her touch, she tells Bud that he is home and can finally relax. Thus, he can have access to the thing he has needed the most for the last four years: people to care for him.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ I said, "Yes, ma'am, my spirit's a lot stronger than it looks too, most folks are really surprised by that."

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Miss Thomas

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Bud tells Miss Thomas that though he is so small and so young, he is tenacious and extremely wise and mature for his age. To Bud, his "spirit" has matured far more quickly than his body, and thus it surprises many adults that he has the poise and the intellect of someone well beyond his years. Indeed, the band members are certainly surprised at Bud's ability to stand in front of an intimidating adult like Herman. While Bud is not necessarily glad to have endured all of the pain and hardship that made his spirit as strong and resilient as it is now, he does seem proud of the way he's turned out and his ability to overcome whatever life throws at him.

☝☝ "That's great, Bud. Something tells me you were a godsend to us, you keep that in mind all of the time, OK?"

Related Characters: Miss Thomas (speaker), Bud Caldwell

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Miss Thomas assures Bud that he was meant to be part of their family. Because Bud loves the band and feels like he belongs in their fold, it is important to Bud to feel just as loved and wanted by the band members. Miss Thomas seems to sense this, so she reminds Bud not to feel

insecure about his place among them. She continues by telling him that his place in their lives feels like a huge blessing to them—as if Bud was personally sent by God himself. In her own way, Miss Thomas prepares Bud for his new life and new identity as one of the members of Herman E. Calloway’s famous band.

Chapter 19 Quotes

“We’ve been hoping for eleven years that she’d send word or come home, and she finally has. Looks to me like she sent us the best word we’ve had in years.”

Miss Thomas smiled at me and I knew she was trying to say I was the word that my momma had sent to them.

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell, Miss Thomas (speaker), Momma / Angela Janet Caldwell

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 223-224

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Miss Thomas explains why Herman never reached out to Bud’s mother—no one knew where she was or even that Bud existed. In calling Bud “the best word” that they could have heard from Angela, Miss Thomas makes Bud feel as if his mother purposely led him into their lives. It suggests that she believes that Momma always meant to use Bud to bring Herman E. Calloway and her together again after years of strife.

Moreover, Miss Thomas’s words also reveal that Bud’s mother will continue to be a strong presence in all of their lives, dead or alive. The huge influence Momma has over her son and her father shows that she will continue to live on in

their hearts and within their household. It also makes Bud realize that his mother can never be truly gone if she continues to guide him along his journey from the grave. Miss Thomas’s words thus make Bud feel as if he and his mother have only become closer since her death.

“The picture looked like it belonged. It’s strange the way things turn out, here I’d been carrying Momma around for all this time and I’d finally put her somewhere where she wanted to be, back in her own bedroom, back amongst all her horses.”

Related Characters: Bud Caldwell (speaker), Momma / Angela Janet Caldwell

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

As the novel comes to a close and Bud unpacks his belongings, he realizes that he feels at home in his new place, in his mother’s room, surrounded by her childhood toys, objects, and her picture. Moreover, he feels like he no longer has to carry his mother’s memory around in his suitcase and protect her things from others. Instead, he realizes that he can carry her with him as long as he keeps her memory alive or as long as he continues to open himself up to the type of love she promised him he deserved all those years ago. As the novel ends with a happy ending for Bud, it’s a happy ending for his mother, too. Her memory—living on through Bud—is back in her childhood room, “back amongst all her horses.”



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

A caseworker arrives as Bud Caldwell is in line for breakfast. Bud believes that her presence means that “either they’d found a foster home for somebody or somebody was about to get paddled.”

Bud immediately deciphers the caseworker’s presence, suggesting that he has had experience both being “paddled” and either going through foster homes himself or watching other people get shifted from home to home. Neither option seems to generate any particularly positive emotions from him.



The caseworker stops right where Bud is in the line and asks him if his name is Buddy Caldwell. Bud responds that his name is “Bud, not Buddy.”

Echoing the novel’s title, Bud stops the caseworker from calling him anything other than Bud, a moment that reveals for the first time just how important his identity and name are to him.



The caseworker takes Bud out of the breakfast line and pulls a “one of the littler boys,” Jerry Clark, out of line too. The woman says that she has good news for them: they both “have been accepted in new temporary-care homes starting [that] afternoon.”

As an orphan in the foster care system, Bud does not have a say in where his new home will be, when he must start living with his new family, or a sense of who the people are. This profound lack of agency begins to suggest that Bud is expendable within the system.



While Jerry will be put in a home with three little girls, the caseworker reveals that Bud will be taken in by Mr. and Mrs. Amos and their 12-year-old son. The woman emphasizes that Bud and Jerry should both be happy with their assignments since the “depression going on all over this country” has made things difficult for everybody. For that reason, she hints that Bud and Jerry should be on their best behavior for their new foster families and be “cheerful, happy, and grateful,” as Jerry puts it for her.

Bud is pressured to be overjoyed by the revelation that he is fortunate enough to have new home at a time when the Great Depression is making life miserable for many people in the country. The caseworker seems to be reminding the boys that not only are they expendable, but that they are also essentially charity cases for their foster families. This message further promotes feelings of insecurity and unworthiness for the boys, making them feel like they are not allowed to express themselves in any way other than joy during a really difficult and lonely experience.



As he makes his way to pack his things, Bud reveals that this will be his third foster home. Though his “nose gets all runny and [his] throat gets all choky and [his] eyes get all stingy” each time he goes to a new home, his “eyes don’t cry no more.”

Bud suggests that though he’s gotten the hang of being shuttled from place to place, it still affects him in surprising ways. His lack of tears may be an attempt at adapting to his volatile life, but he may also be numb to the experience of being in the foster care system. But just because he’s stopped crying does not mean that he is incapable of feeling sad and isolated.



Jerry, however, does cry. This prompts Bud to console him by predicting that Jerry will be treated “like some kind of special pet” as the only boy living with three little girls. Bud, on the other hand, has to worry about living with an “older boy [that] is going to want to fight.” After cheering Jerry up and making sure he “wasn’t so scared anymore,” Bud finishes packing.

Bud reveals that he feels sorry for Jerry, even though Bud is the one destined for “a lot of trouble” by living with the older boy. He reveals that Jerry’s age is a “rough age to be at.” Bud denies that the ages of fifteen or sixteen are the beginning of adulthood, instead claiming that the age of six is the real start of adulthood. It is at this age “that adults talk to you and expect that you understand everything they mean.”

It is also at this age that one’s body starts changing in scary ways. Once you lose a tooth, Bud says, you begin “to wonder what’s coming off next [...] every morning when you wake up it seems a lot of your parts aren’t stuck on as good as they used to be.” Bud reveals that it is at the age of six that he lost Momma; it is also the age that he began his stay at the **Home**.

Finally, Bud pulls out his **suitcase** after revealing that he is one of the few kids who has a suitcase instead of a paper or cloth sack. From there, he checks to make sure that all his things are in the suitcase and no one has run off with his belongings, especially with “more and more kids coming into the **Home** every day.”

Next, Bud examines the **flyers** in his suitcase, particularly a blue one. The flyer has the words “Limited Engagement,” then “Direct from S.R.O. engagement in New York City.” Underneath that, it has the words “Herman E. Calloway and the Dusky Devastators of the Depression!!!!!!”

Bud reveals that the one of the **flyers** includes “Masters of New Jazz” as part of the description along with a blurry picture of a guy who Bud has “a pretty good feeling” is his father.

Bud functions as a parental figure for Jerry in this moment, in the absence of a guardian or counselor at the Home to prepare them for their new temporary homes. Bud appears to be comfortable with this parental role, though he does reveal that his fears for himself about living with an older boy.



Bud’s care for Jerry continues as Bud reflects on his time as a six-year-old like Jerry. He suggests that he grew up in that year, more than he ever could as a teenager. Moreover, Bud reveals that this growth stemmed from the interactions he had with adults, who were impatient with him and his age.



Bud also reflects on how scary and disorienting everything was when he was six—even his own body wasn’t impervious to change. To make matters worse, that disorientation was sharpened by losing his mother—who, given the fact that he’s now in the foster care system, was likely his primary guardian and caretaker—and being sent to an orphanage called the Home, a place that is only a “home,” in name.



Bud’s first quiet moment with his suitcase is marked by his anxiety that everything in it might not be inside. The moment shows just how dear the suitcase and its belongings are to him. It also shows that he views the Home skeptically and doesn’t quite trust everyone in it not to steal.



Bud’s anxiety about the security of his suitcase’s contents means that his few belongings—like these seemingly random flyers—are precious to him. “S.R.O.” is an acronym for “standing room only,” suggesting that these flyers are advertising a band’s show. The reference to “Devastators of the Depression” also reinforce that this book is set during the Great Depression.



In holding on to these flyers, it seems that Bud hopes they provide a clue to tracking down his father and having a real family again. Bud carries this hope with him in his suitcase so that it is always with him regardless of where he is and whose temporary care he is in.



Bud speculates that his “father” is “real quiet, real friendly and [a] smart man.” He also reveals that the **flyer** includes the lines “One Night Only in Flint, Michigan, at the Luxurious Fifty Grand on Saturday June 16, 1932. 9 Until?”

Bud speculates on his father’s temperament, which makes his dreams of having a father feel more concrete.



Bud remembers that his mother had been the one to bring the **flyer** home, though it had made her upset. He didn’t understand why, however, because to him it looked the same as the four other flyers she kept like it on her dressing table. Those ones, according to Buddy, differed only in the fact that they “didn’t say anything about Flint on them.” Bud reveals that shortly after she brought the flyer home, he “knocked on [her] bedroom door” and “found her” dead.

Bud’s flyers also appear to be closely tied with his last few memories of his mother—both right before she died and right after. Thus, the flyers appear to be even more symbolic to Bud as they are literally one of the last things she touched that meant something to her. It’s possible that Bud thinks uncovering the “secret” of the flyers will bring them even closer together.



Bud finishes reminiscing and closes up his **suitcase** after he finishes packing. He sits on the bed with Jerry, who he thinks “must’ve been thinking just as hard as [Bud] was” because of how quiet he was. Together they wait with their “shoulders touching” for what comes next.

Bud and Jerry share a moment of comradery as they await their uncertain future. The image of their shoulders touching suggests that they are a united front—it’s them versus the adult world of the foster care system.



CHAPTER 2

Todd Amos is “hitting [Bud] so hard and fast,” that there is blood squirting from Bud’s nose. Bud tries to get away by crawling under the bed while Todd starts kicking him with his slippers.

Todd Amos, the 12-year-old boy whom Bud was worried would want to fight, is indeed as bad as Bud expected. It is an unfortunate beginning to Bud’s time in his new foster home and suggests that this is just the beginning of even worse things to come.



Eventually Mrs. Amos comes in while Todd is kicking Bud, though she does not interrupt him. Instead she watches him for a while as he kicks Bud—now with a different leg—though it’s a little difficult for her to see exactly what’s happening. When she finally interrupts by calling out “Toddy?” softly, Todd falls on his knees and starts gasping. He tells his concerned mother, through gasps, that he was only “trying to help,” before pointing to a welt on his cheek. Mrs. Amos snatches Bud from under the bed and blames him for hitting her son and provoking his asthma.

Although Mrs. Amos can’t really tell what’s going on—whether Bud is hurting Todd or Todd is attacking Budd—she certainly doesn’t hurry to put an end to the violence. When she finally does intervene, she does it almost reluctantly, as if she is worried about disturbing her son. When Todd lies about Bud abusing him first, Mrs. Amos seems only too happy to believe him and add to Bud’s torture by turning her anger on him.



Todd lies and says that he was just trying to get “Buddy” to go to the “lavatory,” because he’s got “‘bed wetter’ written all over him.” This prompts Bud to feel impressed by Todd’s lying skills. He begrudgingly praises Todd for following “rule 3” of his “Rules and Things for Having a Funner Life and Making a Better Liar of Yourself.” Bud’s rule is that lies should be as simple as possible, although he concedes that Mrs. Amos would believe anything Todd said anyway.

Todd continues to lie about Bud’s involvement in their fight making it seem as if Todd was only trying to defend himself. Bud is more impressed than he is angry about Todd’s lies, but he has enough insight to know that Mrs. Amos would never give him the benefit of doubt anyway, since unlike her son, he is disposable to her.



Bud reveals that the real reason they fought was because Todd had terrorized him with a pencil as he slept. Though the final thing that tipped him off was Todd's insistence on calling him Buddy instead of Bud, despite the fact that he had "already told him twice that [his] name was Bud."

Todd is a violent child who takes an almost immediate disregard for Bud's personal space, dignity, and sense of self. It is particularly Todd's disregard for Bud's sense of self, when he calls him Buddy instead of Bud, that tips Bud over the edge and provokes him to defend himself.



Provoked, Bud hits him and Todd falls on the floor. When Todd eventually got up, he smiled and took off his robe "like he was getting ready to do some hard work." Though Bud put up a good fight, he realized too late that Todd could "hit like a mule."

Todd's behavior is not playful—he seems to want to genuinely hurt Bud—nor is he welcoming to Bud on his first day in a new home. Like many of the places where Bud has been forced to live, the Amoses' household is far from being a real home for Bud.



Mrs. Amos consoles Todd, and she calls Bud a "beastly little brute." She says that she refuses to tolerate Bud in her house for longer and locks him in the room after she and Todd leave. Mrs. Amos leaves and returns with Mr. Amos, as well as Bud's **suitcase**. Bud guesses they have looked inside the suitcase and feels betrayed because they had promised not to.

Mrs. Amos treats Todd tenderly, coddling him like a young child. In contrast, she sees Bud in a dehumanizing light, considering him a "beast[]" and a "brute" rather than a human being. Her cruelty is even more pronounced when she locks Bud in the room and invades Bud's privacy by looking in his suitcase. However, as Mrs. Amos does not view Bud as a true human being with thoughts and feelings, she can quickly and heartlessly disregard his needs.



Mrs. Amos berates Bud for being ungrateful and a foolish member "of our race." She says she will get in touch with the **Home** in the morning and will be returning Bud to them. In the meantime, she lets Bud know that Mr. Amos will take him to the shed tonight where he will sleep.

Mrs. Amos calls Bud a foolish member "of our race" to make him feel as if in letting her down, he has let every member of their race down—and, consequently, that he is profoundly unloved and doesn't belong anywhere or with anyone.



Bud hardly listens to Mrs. Amos; he is still upset that they looked in his **suitcase**, so he starts to plot how to get even. Mrs. Amos refuses to give the suitcase back to Bud when he reaches for it, claiming that it is her insurance that Bud won't steal anything by morning time, since he would never leave without the suitcase. Mrs. Amos then makes Bud apologize to Todd before going to the shed. Bud complies to avoid a beating with the strap she carries.

Bud is not one to have prolonged feelings of sadness. He is a planner, so he gets to work on how to make the Amoses pay, while trying to retrieve his suitcase. Of course, his plan to retrieve the suitcase fails momentarily, so to bide his time he plays along with the Amoses and agrees to apologize to them to avoid more unnecessary pain.



Mr. Amos takes Bud's **suitcase** away while Mrs. Amos leads Bud to Todd's room. Bud apologizes to Todd, then to Mr. Amos, and then finally to Mrs. Amos. He has to lie especially well when apologizing to Mrs. Amos because she does not trust him enough to believe what he says. So, Bud lies and begs her not to take him back to the **Home**, though this is exactly what he wants. Bud reveals that his behavior comes from "rule 118": "you have to give adults something that they think they can hurt you with by taking it away."

After the apology, Todd becomes animated and claims that there are vampire bats, spiders, and centipedes in the shed. Todd also claims one of the children who spent the night in the shed has never been found and all that is left of him is a "big puddle of his blood on the floor." Mrs. Amos gently cautions Todd to not tire himself.

On the way to the shed, Bud passes a shotgun and wonders what the Amoses need it for. He also spies his **suitcase** under the kitchen table—which makes him feel calmer—but he pretends he doesn't see it.

Right outside the shed, Bud refuses to beg for mercy from Mr. Amos. From his vantage point he notices wood, spider webs, and "old yellow newspapers over the glass so the kids who got locked in here couldn't peek out." Mr. Amos gives him his sleeping supplies and nudges him further in, prompting Bud to take "two more baby steps in."

Bud becomes very agitated and realizes that if he were a normal kid, he would cry. He sees a dark stain on the floor and believes it to be blood "from the kid who had disappeared" that Todd told him about. By the time Mr. Amos closes the door, Bud has memorized the shape of the stain. Shortly after, Bud hears the sound of Mr. Amos locking the door with the "loudest click" Bud has ever heard.

Bud is insincere in his apology, but he puts on a good show to make Mrs. Amos less suspicious of him. He follows up the apology performance by begging Mrs. Amos to not send him back to the Home—knowing she will do just that if she thinks it'll make him unhappy—showing himself to be a skillful manipulator of adults. Regardless of the sense of isolation and loneliness the Home brings, to Bud, it is still better than being with the Amoses.



Todd appears to want something bad to happen to Bud, which is why he goes into detail about the blood of the boy who was never found. This detail also reveals that Bud is not the first to suffer such abuse at the Amoses' hands, which casts major doubt on the foster care system's ability to truly nurture and protect the children in its care. Again, Todd, like others in his family has no tenderness or compassion for Bud.



Always the planner, Bud is very aware of his surroundings and of the location of his suitcase, as if he knows a time will come when he will need to know the layout of the Amoses' house.



Though Bud worries about his night in the shed, he refuses to cower in front of an adult—while Bud's dramatic apology moments earlier served a key purpose (manipulating Mrs. Amos into sending him back to the Home), groveling at Mr. Amos's feet won't do any good. Bud continues to look at his surroundings, memorizing things about the shed that may be of use to him later. Nevertheless, despite his grown-up act, Bud is also a child and finds the idea of sleeping in a shed very frightening.



Bud doesn't cry because he's not a "normal kid," but his realization of this suggests that he wishes he were "normal" and could cry freely. Nevertheless, Bud continues to remain vigilant and alert, despite seeing traces of blood and hearing the lock of the door.



CHAPTER 3

In the shed, Bud convinces himself that he is calm and realizes that Mr. Amos may have just pretended to lock the shed. He reaches his arm to try the door but becomes terrified when he sees “three little flat monster heads guarding the doorknob.” The heads have sharp teeth and lips that looked “ready to bite.”

The heads make Bud feel as if he’s suffocating, so he finds some rags in the shed and covers the “fish heads that someone had nailed to the door so [he] couldn’t see them and they couldn’t see [him].” Afterwards, he considers where to sleep. He does not want to sleep on the floor for fear of the “bugs and roaches [that] were crawling around.”

Bud thinks about what happened to his best friend, Bugs, at the **Home** after a cockroach crawled into his ear. Adults had only managed to use tweezers to pull the cockroach’s legs off, and after 15 minutes, Bugs had to be taken to the hospital. When he returned, Bud was the only one awake; Bugs told Bud that the roach was so loud that it had drowned out the sound of his own screams. Bugs insisted that the roach had screamed for his legs, not in a bug language, but in English. From that day on, he became known as Bugs.

Bud refuses to let a roach crawl into his ear and scream “his head off right against [Bud’s] eardrum,” and so he spreads his blanket so that he can lie flush against the window.

Eventually Bud begins to scratch some of the paper covering the window with his jackknife so that he can see outside. Peering outside, he sees the back of the Amoses’ house and a light on in the bedroom. The light keeps Bud calm enough to take a nap.

In the absence of an adult, Bud consoles himself and even tells himself things to make himself feel better. He is so successful that he even believes that Mr. Amos may have only pretended to lock the door. When he goes to check, however, he loses his earlier composure and becomes terrified when he sees the “monsters” that guard the door. In this scene, Bud goes back and forth between seeming like an adult and a child, reminding readers how young he really is but how responsible and mature he’s had to be.



Bud’s resourcefulness is on full display in this passage. He pushes through his fear to cover up the fish heads—what he originally conceived of as “monsters”—so at least he can think clearly without having to look at them. Moreover, Bud’s worries about sleeping on the floor show how much he thinks of self-preservation and depends on himself in a way he can’t depend on other adults in his life.



Even though Bud is outside the Home, its shadow continues to follow him. He remembers Bugs fondly in this moment, grateful that his best friend taught him the dangers of insects crawling into one’s head. He also perhaps misses Bugs and having someone, anyone, to talk to.



Bud—ever the planner—was smart enough to bring his blanket and uses it to ward off insects that may try to crawl into his ear.



Bud also brought his jackknife with him to the shed, suggesting that it is one of those staples that never leave his side. He uses it to take off some of the newspapers covering the window of the shed and spy on the Amoses. He seems to derive calmness from knowing of the Amoses whereabouts, so he decides to nap.



When Bud wakes from his nap, he first notices that there is no longer a light on in the Amoses' bedroom. Next, he notices a big vampire bat inside the shed. Scared and worried that the bat will wake up any minute, Bud tries to escape through the window, but it budes only an inch.

Next, Bud tries the door. He is able to turn the knob at first, which makes him believe that Mr. Amos is "trying to [help] him." But his happiness is short lived as he realizes he can only open the door a little bit because the "padlock and chain on the outside kept it tight."

Out of options, Bud finally picks up a rake and tries to hit the vampire bat, though "every part of [his] guts was shaking." He remembers "rule 328" of his guide: "when you make up your mind to do something, Hurry up and do it, if you wait you might talk yourself out of what you wanted in the first place."

Bud takes out his silver knife in case he doesn't kill the vampire right away, before using the rake to hit the bat. The rake cuts the bat in a half and Bud is surprised that the vampire didn't scream out any words in pain.

Bud curiously begins to hear a sound reminiscent of a buzz saw right as he begins to feel a sting on his cheek. He realizes too late that the vampire bat was actually a hornet's nest, with "six thousand hornets [...] looking for [him]."

As the hornets continue to sting him, Bud tries to escape by "charging the door," though all it does is make the rag he used to cover the fish's heads fall. He tries again, this time charging it with a stance similar to that of Paul Robeson, but again he's unsuccessful. He ends up getting cut by one of the fish head's teeth.

Bud wakes up from his nap, immediately aware of the fact that the Amoses have likely gone to bed. Before he has time to react to this, however, he sees what looks like a "vampire bat." As quick on his feet as he is, Bud makes a daring attempt to escape through the window.



Bud's previous setback does not stop him from continuing to try and escape from danger. He is resilient, so he tries the door after he fails to open the window, though he is unsuccessful again. While he previously held out hope that Mr. Amos had only pretended to lock the door, it's clear that Mr. Amos is just as cruel as the rest of the family. Trapped by "padlock and chain," Bud is essentially the family's prisoner.



Again, Bud shows his knack for thinking on his feet. His two previous escape attempts foiled, Bud uses the tools he has at his disposal to ward off the bat—pushing through his deep fear. Moreover, he shows how much he depends on his "rules" to guide him through hard and scary situations in the absence of an adult.



Bud also hatches a backup plan in case his plan with the rake fails. Again, it shows his ability to plan ahead and adapt to scary situations that other kids would likely be unable to handle. Soon after, Bud's adaptability helps him find his first success of the night, and he kills the "bat."



Of course, Bud's success story is short lived as he realizes that the "bat" was really a hornet's nest. Bud again faces more prospects of pain, making his time at the Amoses' home even more miserable than before.



The hornets hurt Bud with their stings, so Bud desperately continues to look for an out instead of giving up. With no adult to turn to, he draws on Paul Robeson—an African American musician, actor, athlete, and activist—for inspiration. Though Bud of course fails again to get the door to open—and is instead cut by the fish heads—it is still a moment that shows off Bud's strength and courage.



Desperate, Bud tries the window again. He guesses his fear allows him to open the window that time; he tumbles out of it with three hornets who happened to be stinging him at the very same time.

The stings and the cut from the teeth stop hurting as much, though the pain is replaced by Bud's anger. He is mad at the Amoses and at himself for getting trapped "when there wasn't anybody who cared what happened to [him]."

Bud considers how to get even with the Amoses and fantasizes about pulling the trigger of the double barrel shotgun. Eventually he sneaks up the back porch and into the house, plotting.

CHAPTER 4

Bud enters the Amoses' house through an unlocked kitchen window. He finds his **suitcase** is still under the kitchen table, picks it up, and goes to see if the shotgun is still where he last saw it.

Thinking ahead, Bud then places his **suitcase** on the first step of the porch so he "[can] make a quick getaway after [he's] through paying these Amoses back."

Bud believes the Amoses are going to deserve "what they were going to get." Moreover, he believes it is his job to stop Todd from "torturing the kids [...] who didn't know where their mothers and fathers were."

At last, Bud makes an escape through the window, showing his profound ability to persevere through adversity.



Though he is especially mad at the Amoses, Bud blames himself for not looking out for himself more—knowing that he is the only one who cares about his well-being in the world. Bud's pain, isolation, and loneliness bubble up to the novel's surface as he admits to himself for the first time that he doesn't trust anyone to care about him. He has to be his own caretaker—even though he still has so much growing up to do himself.



Bud's anger even propels him to think violent thoughts about the Amoses, which perhaps speaks to the trauma he has faced in the hands of adults in the past. Given his thoughts about how no one cares about him, it seems that Bud's revenge on the Amoses will be revenge against all the adults who have neglected him.



Once in the Amoses' house, Bud decides to get his suitcase first before anything else, emphasizing how precious its contents are to him.



Bud's suitcase is so important to him that he makes sure it gets out of the house safely before he does.



Bud is intent on getting even with the Amoses not only to avenge himself but to avenge the kids who came before him and will come after him. His empathy and concern for these other kids highlights how he's had to become a parental figure of sorts, looking out for himself and those who can't protect themselves.



Bud picks up the shotgun and tries it on for size. He imagines shooting animals with it, and then fantasizes about “creeping” up to a sleeping Todd’s bed and putting the shotgun “right in his nose.” Bud knows he would have to quickly get the adult Amoses after that because “the shotgun going off in Todd’s room would give them a clue that something was going on.”

Bud’s anger draws him to the shotgun. He fantasizes about beating the Amoses at their own game, as his thoughts of putting a shotgun in Todd’s nose violently mirror Todd’s earlier act of shoving a pencil up the sleeping Bud’s nose. He even makes preliminary plans about what he would do if the shotgun going off in Todd Amoses’ room woke the adults up, suggesting how serious he is about getting revenge.



Bud reveals that guns were “just too dangerous to play with” and that the first part of his revenge would be to “get the gun out of the way,” so if the Amoses woke up, they wouldn’t be able to rush and get the gun. Bud fears that “they’d shoot him in a flash and tell the **Home** it was an accident.” So, Bud hides the gun in a corner on the back porch.

Profoundly mature for his age, Bud is able to step away from the temptation of making a cruel and violent mistake and even sounds like an adult when he reasons that guns are “too dangerous to play with.” He does, however, have the foresight to hide the gun to make sure the Amoses don’t find an excuse to kill him by “accident,” knowing that such a thing might not be beyond them.



Bud finds a jar and turns on the tap water. He is surprised the Amoses have hot water running in their house. He fills the jar with warm water and goes to Todd’s room. He tests the water’s temperature, remarks that it’s the “perfect temperature.”

Bud is in awe of the Amoses’ indoor hot water, suggesting that he doesn’t get to enjoy such a luxury at the Home, and especially not in the midst of the Great Depression.



Even though someone at the **Home** had told Bud that dipping a sleeping person’s hand in warm water would make the wet bed, Bud’s attempt to dip Todd’s hands in the water and make him wet the bed are unsuccessful. Eventually, Bud decides to just pour the jar’s contents on Todd’s pajama pants. As Bud pours, Todd twitches and then smiles in his sleep, right before wetting the bed.

As toxic and isolating as the Home can be, it is also the site of many of Bud’s life lessons—like this all-important one about how to make someone wet the bed. True to character, Bud doesn’t give up when his plot doesn’t go quite as planned—he realizes that pouring the warm water on Todd’s pants might be even more effective, if nontraditional, and lo and behold, it works.



Bud tiptoes out of the room and out of the house and has a good laugh. He grabs his **suitcase** and begins walking towards the street, just as he realizes he is on the run and in “serious hot water.”

Bud’s earlier anger is replaced with joy at seeing his plans through and getting even. Moreover, his feelings of happiness are heightened as he’s reunited with his suitcase. With it, he feels complete and at home—though trouble clearly awaits him.



CHAPTER 5

Bud realizes that “being on the lam” isn’t much fun. His welts sting, and he’s paranoid about staying in the neighborhood too long since “he didn’t look like he belonged around here.”

Bud’s only hope is the library. He hopes that Miss Hill can help, and he believes he’ll be able to “sneak into the library’s basement to sleep.” In the meantime, he’s worried about cops watching him as he walks.

At the library, Bud notices there are giant Christmas trees next to the building. Shortly after, he realizes that the window he was planning on using to get into the basement has “big metal bars” on it. Bud knows it’s useless to tug on them, but he tries anyway. Eventually, however, he walks towards the Christmas trees, opens his **suitcase** and takes out his blanket.

Bud opens the **suitcase** and realizes right away that “someone had been fumbling with [his] things” because his blanket is folded differently than how he usually folds it. He knows that it was Mr. and Mrs. Amos, but after realizing that nothing is missing, he admits that though they are “mean old nosy folks [...] you couldn’t call them thieves.”

Bud examines his **suitcase**’s contents. He pulls out his tobacco bag and shakes it to make sure all of the rocks are still inside. He checks the inside of the bag to double check. After, he pulls his mother’s picture out of an envelope to make sure it’s not “hurt.”

Though he has successfully rid himself of the Amoses and their toxic home, Bud is still in physical pain and paranoid about people noticing him. That he feels like he sticks out in the neighborhood speaks to his broader feeling of not belonging anywhere—his mother is dead, there are no adults who care for him, and even the foster care system failed to keep him safe.



Bud seeks refuge in the library and in a librarian that he thinks may help him. While Bud is usually suspicious of adults, Miss Hill is clearly someone who has earned his trust. He even hatches a plan to sleep in the basement library—which suggests he has spent a lot of time in the building memorizing its layout.



Though Bud’s plans are foiled, he remains optimistic and again shows that he has prepared for this turn of events by having his blanket ready to sleep on.



Just like at the start of the novel when he was anxious about other kids from the Home going through his belongings, Bud is extremely unsettled thinking about the Amoses rifling through his suitcase. That he can tell the Amoses have pawed through his belongings shows Bud’s characteristic attention to detail and reinforces just how precious the suitcase and its contents are to him. He also demonstrates some maturity here with his nuanced description of the Amoses—they may be horrible, but they aren’t thieves.



This passage begins to provide some sense of why the suitcase is so special to Bud—it contains things that once belonged to his mother. Alone outside the library, he appears to derive special comfort from examining his mother’s things and her photograph. While parents are traditionally supposed to protect their children, the orphaned Bud protects his mother—in the form of her photograph—and makes sure she is not “hurt.” This is yet another indication that Bud has had to grow up quickly over the years.



Running across the top of the picture is a sign for the “MISS B. GOTTON MOON PARK.” Underneath the sign is Bud’s mother, when she was around his age, “looking down and frowning,” though Bud does not understand why. To him, it looks “like the kind of place where you could have a lot of fun.” His mother was sitting on “a midget horse,” and riding it, with “six-shooter pistols in her hands [...] [that] she wished she could’ve emptied [...] on somebody.”

Bud reveals that Momma once told him she was upset in the picture because her father, who was a “hardheaded man,” had “insisted [...] that [she] wear that horrible hat.” On top of that, Bud’s mother had revealed that the “hat was so dirty.” Bud remembers that whenever his mother began the story, “her eyes would get big and burny,” and she would go around the house reminiscing about the hat and its “absolute filth.” She would do most of the talking while Bud would respond mostly with a simple “Yes, Momma.” He reveals that they had that “conversation a lot of times.”

Bud remembers that when he and Momma had these conversations, she would “squeeze [his] arms and look right hard in [his] face to make sure [he] was listening.” However, those moments of “arm-squeezing [...]” were the only times that things slowed down a bit when Momma was around.”

Most of the time, Bud reveals, things “moved very, very fast when Momma was near,” as if she were a “tornado.” When she was “near,” and things weren’t “blowing around,” she would tell him her “four favorite things,” one about her photo and the other about Bud’s name. Bud reveals that she is the one who told him to never “let anyone call [him] Buddy” because it is “a dog’s name or a name that someone’s going to use on you if they’re being false-friendly.” Afterwards she would explain to him that she had named him Bud because “A bud is a flower-to-be [...] it’s a little fist of love waiting to unfold and be seen by the world.”

The picture shows Bud’s mother as a little girl in the park, not as Bud reminds her. It’s possible he feels even closer to his mom seeing her at his age, like they are friends or co-conspirators, in addition to being mother and child. He also seems to envy his mother’s life as a child—as it seems like the type of childhood he will never have access to.



Bud’s mother had a tempestuous relationship with her father from a young age, which explains her scowl in the picture. Her father was an especially sore topic for her, which Bud noticed early on. Bud’s answer of “Yes, Momma” may have been his attempt to be a good listener and take her side, though it may also speak to his earlier admission that at the age of six—which is when his mother died—grownups “expect that you understand everything they mean” when “they talk to you.” At the time, Bud likely couldn’t fully grasp the nature of Momma’s relationship with her father, both because of Momma’s vague explanations and Bud’s young age.



Momma badly needed a listener, which again connects to Bud’s earlier frustration that adults often expect young children to “understand everything they mean” when they talk. That Momma chose Bud to confide in also suggests that she didn’t have many other people to turn to. Bud’s memories of his mother’s touch are poignant, and his description of the world slowing down suggests that his mother was the center of his world, and everything else faded away when she was near.



Bud’s alternate description of his mother as a “tornado” suggests that she was full of life and energy—though she may have also been emotionally volatile and unstable. Bud also reveals in this passage that she is the one who told him to guard his name against others’ interpretations. With this revelation, the novel’s title takes on additional weight, as the phrase “Bud, not Buddy” is Bud’s way of feeling close to his mother and upholding what she would have wanted for him and his life. Bud’s mother is also the one who told him about his potential to give love and to be loved by the world even when he feels unseen.



Bud's mother would also tell Bud not to worry, and that she'd explain things to him "as soon as [he] get[s] to be a young man," which always worried him. Bud reveals another one of his rules, "rule 83": "If a[n] Adult Tells You Not to Worry, and You Weren't Worried Before, You Better Hurry Up and Start 'Cause You're Already Running Late."

That Bud's mother doesn't try to force Bud to understand everything at such a young age suggests that she does realize, to some extent, just how young he is. Bud's "rule 83" also highlights how much he's had to grow up—he has the emotional sensitivity and awareness to realize that when an adult says "don't worry," it usually means that something worrisome is, in fact, about to happen. This also speaks to Bud's general distrust of adults and the things they say.



Finally, Momma would tell Bud that "when one door closes, [...] another door opens," which had confused him at the time. Now, Bud realizes he "should've known then that [he] was in for a lot of trouble." He realizes Momma was wrong by not telling him everything she wanted to before, because "now that she's gone, [he'll] never know what [those things] were." Bud believes he now understands what Momma had meant by doors closing leading to doors opening as he thinks back to the events of the last few days.

Bud draws on his mother's wisdom that blessings are always around the corner, a particularly pertinent reminder right now, as Bud is still all alone outside of the library in the middle of the night. Instead of feeling heartened by his mother's words in the moment, however, Bud thinks about all the other things he wishes she could have told him before her death.



Tired of thinking, Bud closes and ties his **suitcase** and finds space under the Christmas tree to lie with his blanket. He remembers he must wake up "real early" to make it to the "mission in time for breakfast" because they won't let him in if he's even one minute late.

Once again, Bud reveals himself to be a strategic planner who is accustomed to taking care of himself. Instead of having a parent to wake him up in the morning, Bud reminds himself to wake up "real early," showing how he's had to become his own parent. In addition, even though he's only a child, he has the foresight to think about how he'll find his next meal and the awareness to know exactly where to turn for help. Missions are secular or religious institutions, often staffed by volunteers, that focus on serving the poor and homeless by providing hot meals and other types of support.



CHAPTER 6

Bud wakes up and sees the sun peeking through a Christmas tree. He jumps up and runs "six or seven blocks down to the mission." He notices the line is long and tries to get behind the last person but is stopped by a man who tells him the line is closed.

The long line at the mission is another reminder that the book is set during the Great Depression and that these are hard times for everyone.



Bud tries to protest, but the man tells him that rules are rules. Everyone else has been waiting in line for the past two hours, so it's not fair that Bud gets to sleep in and slip into the line. Just because Bud is "skinny and raggedy," the man adds, doesn't mean he can get special treatment. He reminds Bud to get in line for dinner at 4 p.m.—dinner is served at 6 p.m.—and threatens him with a "heavy black strap," forcing Bud to back away.

Bud takes two steps back before another man puts his hand around Bud's neck from behind. Startled, Bud looks behind him and sees a "tall, square-shaped man in old blue overalls." The man begins referring to Bud as Clarence and shakes his head at Bud when Bud tries to deny his name is Clarence. He motions for Bud to join his "momma" in line and Bud sees a woman, "pointing her finger at her feet" next to two children. Bud walks towards her and the children, and the woman slaps him when he gets there.

Bud tries to thank the strangers for saving him, but his "pretend parents" hit him whenever he tries to say something out of character. He waits in line with his pretend parents for a "long, long time," and remarks that everyone in line was "very quiet." Finally, as they near the end of the line, people start "laughing and talking," mostly about the sign on the building. The sign shows a rich, smiling white family in a fancy car with a sign that reads, "THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE AMERICA TODAY!"

Bud enters the mission with his pretend parents. They say thank you a lot as they are served oatmeal, two pieces of bread, and a glass of milk. As they walk through the breakfast line, they are reminded to read the signs on the walls. The signs remind them to eat quickly and quietly and to be considerate.

The man seems to be some sort of mission security guard, given the strap that he carries. He is strict, domineering, and unfeeling, which seems representative of the adults who have been tasked with taking care of Bud since his mother's passing. The man doesn't care that Bud is "skinny and raggedy," nor does he worry about the fact that Bud is all alone—instead, he treats Bud like a lazy, good-for-nothing kid who intentionally slept in, which readers know isn't the case.



Luckily, a stranger comes to Bud's rescue by making it seem as if Bud is his son. Unaccustomed to having other people looking out for him—and generally skeptical of adults—Bud at first does not understand what is going on. However, the man continues to insist that Bud is part of the family—unwilling to see Bud leave without food. He even makes Bud join the rest of the "family" in line, inducting Bud into his family in the process so that Bud belongs with them at least temporarily.



Bud begins to think of these kindly strangers as his "pretend parents," which shows that he is willing to play into the fantasy of having a real family. The picture of the smiling white family seems to be mocking all those in line by singing praises about America at a time marked by economic struggle. Race is a subtle undercurrent in the novel, and the fact that the family on the sign is white—and that they appear both rich and optimistic about life in their country—speaks to the profound racial inequality in the United States during this time, as white people were able to enjoy countless privileges and opportunities that black people had no way to access. This book is set during the Great Depression, and segregation didn't end in the U.S. for nearly 20 years after that.



Bud, flanked by his pretend parents, enjoys a hearty breakfast. Even though these people are strangers whom Bud met by chance, they are taking far better care of him than most of the adults in the novel who are legally tasked with caring for Bud.



Bud and his pretend family get to the table and sit next to a group of strangers. Bud's pretend momma asks her children if they mind sharing some of their brown sugar with "Clarence," and though Bud's pretend siblings pout, the woman pours a third of the sugar into Bud's oatmeal. Bud thanks her and calls her momma, which makes his pretend parents laugh. They congratulate him for "catch[ing] on."

Unlike an intimate meal with a real family, Bud eats surrounded by strangers. However, Bud experiences more warmth and love in the care of these strangers than he did in the care of his many foster families or the Home. Bud is grateful to his pretend parents for sharing what little luxuries, like sugar, that they have with him, an outsider. This passage highlights how economic hardship has the power to bring people together and create solidarity, as Bud's pretend parents treat him with kindness and tease him as if he truly were part of their family.



The pretend parents tell Bud they only come in the mornings and remind him to get there early for dinner. One their way out, one of Bud's pretend siblings sticks his tongue out at Bud, but he doesn't blame them for not wanting to share their parents.

Eventually Bud and his pretend family part ways, and though Bud puts on a brave face, he appears a little wistful for their presence. Like the pretend parents' son, he would never want to share his parents either—if he had them.



CHAPTER 7

Bud enters the library; he closes his eyes and breathes deeply to take in all the smells—that of old leather-bound books, new cloth-covered ones, and the "soft, powdery, drowsy smell" of paper "that comes off the pages in little puffs when you're reading." He hypothesizes that the "hypnotizing smell" of the library is the reason why "so many folks fall asleep" in it. Bud imagines that it's the drooling that upsets librarians the most.

Bud takes comfort in being in the library, so it makes sense that it was the first place he turned to after running away from the Amoses' house. The library perhaps serves as a comforting reminder to Bud that answers are right around the corner. That comfort can even, according to Bud, lull one into a peaceful sleep.



When Bud opens his eyes after taking a big whiff, he starts his search for Miss Hill. When he doesn't see her at the lending desk, he drops his **suitcase** with a white lady there, noting that he "[knew] it would be safe."

Throughout the novel, Bud rarely parts with his treasured suitcase and doesn't trust anyone with it. However, it's clear that the library is a place that brings him comfort and makes him feel safe, so it's fitting that he thinks his suitcase will be safe with a librarian. Given that the librarian is a white woman, though, this moment also raises the question of if Bud has internalized some racial stereotypes and thus assumes that because the woman is white—not because she's a librarian—she won't steal or harm the suitcase.



After checking the library three times, Bud goes back to the white lady at the lending desk. He declines her offer to give him back his **suitcase** and asks her instead of Miss Hill's whereabouts. The librarian is taken aback by Bud's question and realizes he hasn't "heard" the news. Bud is wary of what the librarian is going to say because, as he notes in "rule 16" of his guide, whenever an adult brings up a conversation with "Haven't you heard," they are about to "drop you headfirst into boiling tragedy."

Again, Bud leaves his suitcase with the white librarian as he talks to her, which is perhaps another reflection of how much trust he has in the librarian's whiteness and what he consequently assumes to be her inability to steal. As Bud swiftly prepares himself to hear bad news, the novel suggests that he has grown accustomed to hearing bad news from adults, which is likely part of why he is so wary of them.



Bud prepares himself for the worst news, assuming it has to do with “kicking the bucket,” but the librarian tells him that the news isn’t bad, unless he had “matrimonial plans concerning Ms. Hill.” She reveals that Ms. Hill, with her new husband, recently moved to Chicago, Illinois.

The librarian shows Bud where Chicago is in relation to Flint on a map. Bud notes, however, that maps are tricky. He asks the librarian how far it would take him to walk there. She responds that it’ll take him “quite a while.” After opening a few more books to double check the distance, she notes that it would take Bud 54 hours to walk there. Bud is devastated and sits down to think about his next steps. He notes that returning to the **Home** is “out”—it’s a revolving door of new kids and sick babies, and the adults there don’t even know the names of the children in their care.

A little after, Bud retrieves his **suitcase** and leaves the library. He is sure that a new door is about to “open” just like Momma said, because the closing library door behind him is “the exact kind of door Momma had told [him] about.” Soon after, he sleeps under a tree.

CHAPTER 8

The noise of someone stepping on a stick wakes Bud up. The person seems to sense that Bud is awake and stands very still. Though Bud can’t see them from under his blanket, he gets ready to attack them with his jackknife.

Bud gets ready to pull back the blanket and start “running or stabbing,” but someone jumps on him before he can do anything. As Bud gets ready to aim his jackknife at the person’s heart, he hears the person say, “If you ain’t a kid called Bud from the **Home** I’m really sorry about jumping on you like this.” From that, Bud realizes it is Bugs.

While it’s certainly disheartening that Bud now has one less adult he can trust in his life, the revelation that Ms. Hill has gotten married and moved away at least puts Bud’s anxiety to rest. His hasty conclusion that Ms. Hill “kick[ed] the bucket”—meaning that she died—suggests that Bud’s mother’s death was perhaps also framed to him as big news that some adult had to tell him about, and now he assumes all big news is bad news.



The librarian continues to help Bud find answers, this time about Chicago’s distance from Flint. It seems that Bud initially considers walking to Chicago, but it soon becomes clear that will not be possible because of the distance. For once, Bud does not have another plan up his sleeve and has to take time to think through his options. What is clear, however, is that returning to the Home and the negativity and isolation it fuels is completely out of the question.



Though he’s exceedingly mature for his age, Bud’s youth shines through in this passage as he takes his mother’s advice literally and believes that since the physical door to the library just closed, a new door—metaphorical or otherwise—will open.



Bud is alert as soon as he feels someone’s presence watching him as he sleeps. He shows that he is prepared for whoever the intruder may be by taking out his jackknife and getting ready to defend himself—once again, Bud must be his own parent and fend for himself.



Bud continues to cautiously prepare to defend himself in an extreme and violent way. Luckily, Bugs’s revelation that he is looking for “Bud from the Home” deescalates the situation, and Bud realizes he is joined by a friend rather than a foe.



Bud eventually makes Bugs get off him and tries to catch his breath. He realizes that Bugs is on the run as well and Bugs confirms this, saying that after he heard about what Bud did to the “kid” (Todd), he was inspired to take off too and thought he would find Bud at the library in case Bud wanted to leave together.

Bud asks questions about Bugs’s plans to catch a train the following day, go out West, and pick fruit to make money. Bugs asks Bug questions about the age and size of the kid Bud “beat up.”

After Bugs explains everything from sleeping to peeing on the train to his friend, Bud excitedly agrees to go West with Bugs. They commemorate their decision with a spit-soaked handshake, and Bud is delighted to “finally have a brother.” They decide to go to the mission to ask for advice on how to find the train.

They find out that they must catch the train from Hooperville. They follow a trail along Thread Creek through the woods until they get to Hooperville. When they do, they hear music and people and a crackling fire. Bud is surprised about how small the town is. He notes that a “big wind or even two or three big wolves huffing and puffing real hard could blow Hooperville into the next county,” because it is mostly made of “boxes” and “shacks.”

Bud notices that there are two big fires in use in Hooperville. One man stirs things in a pot over the fire and gives the clothes he brings out of it to a white man. The other fire, which is set apart from the rest of the group, is surrounded by five white people: two kids, a man, a woman, and a baby.

Bugs and Bud flip a coin to see who should ask for food. Bud loses, and Bugs tells him to ask the residents if they are in Hooperville and if they have any extra food.

In addition to both being from the Home, Bugs and Bud now share the experience of being homeless and fending for themselves. It is a moment that brings them closer together, since Bugs follows up by specifically asking Bud if they can join forces.



Bud is detail-oriented and thus asks Bugs logistical questions about his plans to go West by catching a train, while Bugs asks him about Todd Amos. That Bugs even knows about Todd and Bud’s fight reveals that Mrs. Amos has already informed the Home of what she believes to be Bud’s bad behavior.



Bud appears to have never felt as close to someone, besides his mother, as much he does to Bugs in this moment. After they make their plans, Bud feels as if he has finally found a family and a home in Bugs.



Bugs and Bud, even more resourceful now that they are a two-person team, find the road to Hooperville, where they will catch the train. They are greeted by a music and what sounds like a community of people living in what looks like a makeshift town. It catches Bugs and Bud by surprise and they are unsure of what to make of the big group and the really poor living conditions.



Bud continues to carefully observe some of Hooperville’s other characteristics: the food, what the fires are being used for, and the demographic of the town in an attempt to understand it.



In flipping a coin, Bugs and Bud treat their situation—running away from the orphanage and the foster care system—as a game rather than a serious endeavor with steep repercussions. While Bud is wise beyond his years, moments like this are poignant reminders that he still just a child.



Bud goes up, waits until he gets the residents' attention before asking the if he is in Hooperville. One of the white men sitting around the fire is confused, so Bud asks his question again. A man who was playing the mouth organ corrects him by telling him the place he's actually looking for is called Hooverville, as in President Hoover.

The mouth-organ man tells Bud that this is one of many Hoovervilles, which annoys Bud, because it makes it hard to say if this is the *right* Hooverville. The man then asks Bud if he's hungry (Bud says yes), tired (again Bud says yes), and scared of what tomorrow brings (Bud says, "not exactly" because he's trying to be brave), because as long as he is "in need," he is in the correct Hooverville.

Bugs appears from behind the tree and the man tells them to look around at Hooverville. Bugs and Bud realize it is much bigger than they originally thought. They also notice that it is very diverse, with "black, white, and brown [people]." Bud notes, though, that the glow of the fire "made everyone look like they were different shades of orange." The mouth-organ man tells them that all the people are similar to them, and that Hooverville is "nearer to home than [they'll] ever get." He cautions them against riding the rails and looking for better things because "they're singing the same sad song all over the country." He adds that because the boys are from Flint, this is the right Hooverville for them.

The mouth-organ man invites Bugs and Bud to eat as long as they agree to pitch in by serving on the "KP," or "Kitchen Police," and doing the cleanup. Bugs and Bud agree; a woman gives them some makeshift china, and they help themselves to two servings of muskrat stew.

When it is time for the boys to fulfill their cleanup tasks, the woman asks Bud to leave his **suitcase** while they clean. Bud resists but eventually consents at the end. However, he asks the woman to assure him that no one will touch it, before he leaves it near her feet.

The homeless population boomed during the Great Depression, with many people losing their homes due to being unable to pay their mortgages. In response to this, homeless people turned to constructing shanty towns called "Hoovervilles," named after President Herbert Hoover. Hoover was president during the Depression and many people believed he was to blame for the economic crisis.



Bud is still confused when he learns that there are multiple Hoovervilles. His anxiety about whether or not he is in the right one emphasizes how detail-driven he is. Part of his ability to be resourceful is to understand his environment as much as possible. However, the mouth-organ man reminds Bud that as long as he needs some solace from the difficult economic times, he is in the right place, highlighting the novel's overarching idea that financial hardship brings people together.



Bugs joins Bud immediately, and they realize the true size of their new temporary home, how it seems to have space for everyone within its makeshift walls. They also note the diversity of Hooverville and how everyone—regardless of race—seems to belong, united by the same shared economic struggle. Even though Bugs and Bud just arrived, the mouth-organ man encourages them to call Hooverville home and take part in belonging to the community of people who share many of their same hardships.



At last, Bugs and Bud share in a meal with other Hooverville residents. Again, because community is so important within Hooverville, Bugs and Bud are expected to do their part to maintain Hooverville in exchange for care and food.



Bud appears to trust his fellow community members so much that he agrees (albeit hesitantly) to leave his suitcase with a woman he barely knows while he does his share of work.



Bud notices that he, Bugs, a girl, and a little white boy will be doing the dishes. The girl is in charge and splits the group into two: she'll be with Bud, and Bugs will be with the white boy. That way, they can each do half of the dishes.

The girl introduces herself as Deza Malone, and Bud introduces himself. They find a spot at the creek, and the girl tells him that she'll wash while he dries. As they work, Bud tells her he plans to take the train to Chicago. Deza tells him that her dad plans to take it too to look for work in the West again. Bud notices that though she's "real fast at washing the dishes," she is "touching [his] hand a lot" as she gives the dishes to him.

Deza asks him about his family, and Bud tells her his mother died and he believes his father lives in Grand Rapids. Deza tells him that family is the most important thing there is, and Bud responds that his mother used to say something similar to him. Bud stops talking abruptly when he believes he's said too much.

After Deza presses him a little more, Bud decides to open up after all. Bud remembers how his mother would tell him "that there had never been a little boy, anywhere, anytime, who was loved more than she loved [him]." Deza tells him that he's different because he carries his "family around inside of [him]," and Bud agrees that he does carry them inside—and "inside [his] **suitcase**" as well.

Deza asks Bud why he doesn't go back to the orphanage, and finally Bud comes clean and tells her that he's on the run; he asks her not to tell anyone. Deza then warns him about the railroad police and how he's "going to have a bad surprise tomorrow morning."

This passage contains another reminder that Hooverville is a racially diverse community, which is significant given the fact that the book is set in the midst of the Great Depression, when racial segregation was still widespread.



Deza's reflections on her dad reveal that, like Bud, she places a lot of emphasis on family. She appears to miss his presence similar to the way Bud misses his mother's presence.



Bud also opens up about his family to Deza and reveals that he thinks that his father is in Grand Rapids. It appears the longer he spends outside of the foster care system, the more he thinks about his mother and the flyers that once belonged to her. Of course, the more he thinks about the flyers, the more he thinks the man in them must be his father. Deza encourages this line of thought by bringing up the importance of family, making Bud even more aware of his mother's absence and how much he hopes he'll get another chance to have a family. Bud stops talking towards the end, afraid that if he continues to talk about his hopes out loud, it may jinx it.



Bud's recollections of his mother become more nostalgic and he appears to long for the love and validation she gave him before she passed. Deza reminds him, however, that his mother is still present in his thoughts and memories. Bud also suggests that he has preserved her and her memory within his suitcase, which is filled with things that once belonged to her.



While Bud would not trust an adult with this information, he trusts Deza enough to tell her that he is on the run. Deza decides to be open with him as well and hints that tomorrow will be eventful because of the railroad police—something Bud hasn't seemed to plan for.



Deza asks Bud if he's ever kissed a girl at the orphanage. Bud worries that he has to kiss her to prove himself, and so he does. After, Deza puts her hand in Bud's and he leaves it there. Together they listen to a song called "Shenandoah." Deza tells him it reminds her of her parents. Eventually Bud pulls his hand away. Deza tells him she'll "never forget this night," and though he doesn't say anything, he knows he'll always remember it as well because it was his first kiss.

They reunite with Bugs and his dishwashing partner and begin walking back. They pass the group of white people with a coughing baby, and Bud asks if "they aren't allowed to sit around the big fire 'cause [the] baby's making so much noise." Deza tells her it's actually because they claim that as "white people," they "ain't in need of a handout."

When they get back to the main fire, Bud retrieves his **suitcase** and is happy to see it hasn't been tampered with. Bud and Bugs go to sleep to prepare for tomorrow. Bugs falls asleep quickly, but Bud can't. Instead, he takes out and "opens his jackknife and put[s] it under [his] blanket."

Bud wonders if it's a good idea to go to California given that it made "a whole lot more sense to think that they were somewhere around Flint instead of out west."

Eventually, Bud goes through his **suitcase** to make sure everything is still in it. He looks through the "five smooth stones" that he found after the ambulance took his mother away. However, he is unable to decipher the codes on them, like "flint m. 8.11.11." and "gary in. 6.13.12." He then makes sure his mother's picture is still in its proper place.

Bud saves the **flyers** for last. He takes a closer look at the "blue one" and thinks that Momma must have been more bothered by this one because the man in it is his father—after all, "Why else would Momma keep these?"

Bud and Deza's conversation grows romantic until they eventually kiss, an action that cements their budding friendship and comfort with each other. For one brief moment, it is them against the adult world. Deza senses how important their shared moment is and insists it will stay with her forever, making Bud realize that he probably won't either. It will be a moment of happiness in an otherwise bleak and poor life on the run.



Bud encounters a group of white people who have set themselves apart from the community and realizes that racism can exist even in what seems like such a racially diverse and welcoming place.



Bud reunites with his suitcase and like before, it brings him great pleasure to be reunited with something that is so tied to his memories of his mother. Bud sleeps with a jackknife—an engrained habit by this point—prepared to fend off anything that may take him by surprise during the night.



Bud continues to think of his conversation with Deza about family until he has the realization that maybe he should stay in Michigan to chase the hope, on the chance it is true, that he has family out there waiting for him.



Bud goes through his suitcase again, almost looking for a sign to confirm what he wants to be true more than anything: that he has family somewhere. He brings out the rocks, but they are still decipherable, so he settles for looking through other items looking for clues.



Bud examines the flyers and concludes that the man in them is definitely his father. While he had hoped that this was true in the past, in this moment, he has successfully convinced himself that it must be true, revealing just how deeply he longs for a family of his own.



After using a trick of breathing deeply to help him fall asleep, Bud then pretends Momma is reading him stories. He dreams first about the “man with the giant fiddle,” from the photo, then Herman E. Calloway, and then Deza Malone.

Bud is able to sleep, convinced that there is family out there waiting for him. Bud's dreams seem to confirm that he's on to something as Herman E. Calloway features in his dreams heavily.



Bud wakes up to man loudly screaming that “they’re trying to sneak it out early.” Bud runs outside and someone tells him and Bugs that the train is “trying to sneak out before [they] get up.” Bugs urges Bud that they have to get on the train, so Bud hastily packs up his suitcase.

Bud awakens to the news that he and Bugs might not make the train. Ever adaptive as usual, Bud prepares to run to meet it.



However, a boy gets Bud’s attention and he realizes he has forgotten his **flyer**. He runs back and gets it, before joining the “million men and boys running in the same direction.”

Bud's refusal to leave the flyer behind shows that when it comes down to it, Bud's family is the most important thing to him—more important than Bugs, more important than getting on the train, more important than going West.



When they get to the train, Bud tries to find Bugs and pushes through the front of the crowd; however, he realizes that people have stopped because of the four cop cars. The cops tell the crowd to disperse but it continues to get bigger.

Though Bud is unable to find Bugs, Bud is not alone. It is as if Bud exists with the rest of the crowd trying to get on the train as one giant body. Everyone shares the same goal of getting on that train and finding a better life no matter the cost.



The crowd of people attempting to get on the train continues to get bigger making one of the cops give up on controlling the crowd by throwing “his cop hat” and “billy club to the ground.” The train whistle, meanwhile, picks up steam, as more cops follow the example of the first cop and throw their hats and clubs down.

More people join the crowd of people trying to get on the train heading towards the hope of a better, more stable life, once again revealing how financial hardship can bring people together. United and ready to put up a fight to get what they want, they are able to scare off the cops.



The engine gets louder and the crowd rushes to the train. Bud starts running and sees Bugs. He throws him his **suitcase**, but the **flyer** falls. It lands in Bud’s hand and he slows down and puts it in his pocket. However, he is unable to join Bugs on the train as a result, so Bugs throws Bud’s suitcase back out of the train, and Bud walks to retrieve it as the train speeds away.

In a split-second decision, Bud has to choose between retrieving his flyer and getting on his train with his “brother.” In other words, he has to choose between the security of living with Bugs, someone he's known for a long time, and the hope of finding his father. Bud chooses the flyers, which means that his temporary role as Bugs's brother abruptly comes to an end. However, the moment shows that Bud feels like he has something worth fighting for here in Flint.



When Bud heads back to Hooverville, he hears gunshots and hides in the woods. From his hiding place, he sees a blazing fire and the cops throwing “wood and cardboard and hunks of cloth into the middle of it.” Bud looks for Deza but can’t find her.

Back in Hooverville, the dream of a community built around shared economic struggle and hardship ends abruptly as well. The town is nothing more than a pile of trash by the time Bud arrives. To make matters worse, he is unable to find Deza, his confidant.



Bud takes these last-minute events as a sign that he should maybe stay in Flint. He takes out the **flyer** again and wonders again if Herman E. Calloway is his father, especially since it’s a really similar name to Caldwell.

Bud, discouraged but optimistic, remains hopeful that all of the day’s disasters means that he should stay and look for Herman E. Calloway, his best bet for a family.



Bud realizes he can’t stay and look for Deza because “it was too hard to hear all the people crying and arguing,” so instead he hurries to get breakfast at the mission.

As much as he wants to make sure that Deza is okay, Bud realizes that it wouldn’t be wise to entangle himself in the chaos unfolding in Hooverville. He thus focuses on meeting his most immediate need: finding food.



CHAPTER 9

Bud eats at the mission and then heads to the library where he sees the librarian he met previously. He asks her for a pencil, paper, and the book “about how far one city is from another.”

After breakfast, Bud intends to find answers so, like before, he looks to the librarian for guidance.



The librarian tells Bud that she remembers how he and his mother used to come to the library together years ago. His mother would ask for “mysteries and fairy tales,” but he would ask for Civil War books.

The librarian’s revelation suggests that the library was a haven for both Bud and his mother. In fact, it is perhaps for this reason that Bud still continues to go to the library when he needs answers.



After the librarian gives Bud the supplies, she tells him that she has a surprise for him. The librarian is beaming, but Bud isn’t too excited about it.

Bud does not seem to trust the librarian’s surprise. His response reveals the wariness he reserves for adults.



Bud calculates that he’ll need to walk for 24 hours to get to Grand Rapids. He decides to do the “night part first” and writes down names of cities he’ll walk through on his way.

Bud uses the supplies the librarian gave him to calculate the distance he’ll have to travel to get to the city he believes his father resides. Bud’s resourcefulness gets him one step closer to finding his family.



When Bud returns to the librarian, she gives him a huge book called *The Pictorial History of the War Between the States*, and while Bud isn't excited about the history part, he notes that the gory pictures make it a "great book."

Bud gets engrossed in the book and doesn't feel time passing. The librarian tells him he can "start up again first thing tomorrow." The librarian gives him a paper bag, and he returns to his spot under the tree to eat the cheese sandwich that he finds in it. After, he begins his journey to Grand Rapids.

Bud remembers the "seed" of his idea that Herman E Calloway was his father began with a boy named Billy Burns. Billy had challenged him and other boys to name their parents, hinting that they didn't know them. Bud tried to prove him wrong by telling him that "my daddy plays a giant fiddle and his name is Herman E. Calloway." The "seed" of that idea continued to grow into a "mighty maple" as he imagined his mother must have left the **flyers** as a "message" to him "about who [his] daddy was."

Bud looks through more **flyers** from his **suitcase**, and he notes that two of them have the same picture of Herman E Calloway, while some just have drawings with names. After putting the flyers back, Bud exclaims that like Bugs, he "was going west!"

CHAPTER 10

Bud leaves Flint and realizes that 24 hours of walking will be a lot longer than he thought. He is alarmed by the country sounds of "bugs and toady-frogs and mice and rats playing a dangerous scary kind of hide-and-go-seek."

Bud takes to hiding in bushes when cars go by, but as he grows tired, he does it less frequently. Consequently, a car speeding through almost blinds Buddy, prompting him to hide in the bushes. The man in the car pulls up near Bud and gets out. He whistles loudly, making all the country noises stop, and calls out for Bud with a "Say hey!"

The librarian's surprise—while Bud isn't too excited about it—does show Bud that some adult surprises aren't all that bad.



Because Bud loves learning and spending time in the library, time passes so quickly that he doesn't realize the library is closing until the librarian tells him. The librarian also gives him a sandwich, further proving to Bud that he can have a pleasant interaction with an adult—as rare and brief as they may be.



While thinking about his trip to Grand Rapids, Bud realizes how successfully he had nursed and cultivated the "seed" of his idea that Herman E. Calloway was his father until it became a maple tree of its own that could stand without needing constant attention from Bud to give it life. Bud is proud of himself and his ability to flower ideas and read the clues he believes his mother left him.



Bud studies the picture of Herman in an attempt to learn as much of his "father" as possible. It is as if the flyers of Herman contain pivotal information that will make and get Bud closer to him.



Bud's journey does not start off on the right foot as the night's noises frighten him and make him feel even more isolated and vulnerable. However, he does not give up because of his certainty that the road will bring him towards a family.



Bud, aware of his vulnerability as a child, seeks to avoid any adults that will ruin his plans and send him back to the Home.



Bud eventually peeks his head out, and the man tells him “he’s a long way from home” and asks him if he’s from Flint. Bud stays quiet, so the man tempts him by telling him he has a spare baloney sandwich and an apple in his car. He continues by offering Bud and “extra red pop” as well.

Bud tries to get the man to leave the food on the side of the road, but the man tells him that the deal only works if Bud shows him his face. Bud thinks the man sounds OK, so he slides his **suitcase** in the weeds and reveals himself.

Before he gives the sandwich and soda to Bud, the man explains that they have “some talking to do first.” In the meantime, Bud notices he’s wearing the hat of someone “who drove fancy cars for rich folks”—a red hat.

The man tells Bud he has a problem that he needs Bud’s help with. This prompts Bud to note that according to “rule 87,” this usually means that the adult wants the child to get something for them.

The man suggests that Bud tell him what he’s doing on the road first, so they can “go about [their] business.” Eventually the man prods Bud to tell him his name—“Bud, not Buddy”—and Bud explains that he’s run away from home.

The man gives Bud the soda, but before Bud can finish it, he asks Bud where “home” is. Bud, more alert, is suspicious that the man won’t let him stay on the road, but he realizes he’s fine with it. He also decides that he won’t tell the stranger about the **Home** or the Amoses.

Bud eventually decides to peek and see who has discovered him, not because he trusts the man but because he doesn’t feel like he has another choice. Bud does not speak, however, forcing the man to offer him food for information after he likely senses how hungry Bud would be on the run as a vulnerable child.



Bud tries to convince the man to leave the food on the side of the road, another one of his attempts to outsmart adults and call the shots. The man, however, proves to be a match for Bud, and he makes Bud reveal his face. It is unclear who the true winner is as Bud successfully maneuvers his suitcase out of sight—showing that he still has some control over the situation.



The man prods Bud with questions instead of giving him the food, showing that he may have some ulterior motives for getting Bud to come out. As a result, Bud perhaps puts his guard back up and he begins to take in his surroundings, looking for clues about who this man is and what his intentions are.



Bud’s skepticism for the man grows when the man seems to try and trick Bud. In response, Bud once again turns to his rules to help him make sense of his current situation and figure out what to do.



The man’s tactics, however prove to be successful, perhaps because he makes it seem as if he will let Bud go once he finds out the information that he’s seeking. Either way, Bud complies with the man uses the opportunity to proudly declare to him that his name is Bud and nothing else.



The man proves to be a man of his word at first, but Bud quickly becomes suspicious again when the man begins to ask him questions about his “home.” Bud quickly decides to lie about his home so that the man won’t send him back to the Amoses or the Home and ruin his plans to find Herman.



Bud lies that he ran away from Grand Rapids, secretly hoping that the man will put him on a bus so that he won't have to do more walking. Instead the man tells him he's from Grand Rapids too, grabs Bud's hand, and walks him to the car. The man explains that they're in a town called Owosso, and that not too long ago there was a sign hanging in the town that read: "To Our Negro Friends Who Are Passing Through, Kindly Don't Let the Sun Set on Your Rear End in Owosso!" Bud remembers his **suitcase**, so the man walks him back to the bushes to get it, never letting his grip go—Bud thinks the man must not trust him.

Afterwards, the man opens the passenger's seat and Bud sees him take out a box from the front seat to put in the back. Bud wishes he could run "like the devil was chasing [him]" when he sees that "URGENT: CONTAINS HUMAN BLOOD!!!" is written on the box. Bud believes the man must be a vampire and thinks the man would "rather have [his] fresh blood than blood out of a bottle."

The man tells Bud that he'll send a telegram to Bud's family and drive him down to Grand Rapids tomorrow. He tells Bud to enter the car and lets go of his arm. So, Bud enters and locks the door, then slides to the driver's side and closes it before locking the door just as the "vampire" tries to get in. From there, Bud puts his jackknife under his thigh and takes off in the car as the vampire runs after him.

CHAPTER 11

The car stops after "thirty giant steps," and the "vampire" catches up to Bud. He asks Bud to roll down his window, and Bud does in a way that only "their words could get in and out but [the vampire's] hand or claws couldn't."

The "vampire" asks him to explain, and Bud tells him that he's read the box. Moreover, Bud tells him he knows how to kill vampires and that his knife is "solid twenty-four-karat silver."

Bud decides to tell the man that he is running from Grand Rapids instead of to Grand Rapids to ensure that the man can't take him back to Flint, the place he is trying to escape from and the place of all his most recent misery. This moment echoes an earlier one in the novel, when Bud pleaded with Mrs. Amos to not send him back to the Home in the secret hope that she would. This moment is also another dark reminder of the racism pervading the nation at this point in time. The sign in Owosso suggests it's a sundown town—an all-white town that restricts black people from being within town limits after dark through a combination of intimidation, discriminatory laws, and brutal violence.



Bud remains suspicious and appears to look for clues that show the man's intentions are not good—regardless of how the man has proved himself. After all, Bud is often wary of the adults in his life. For this reason, he is more prone to believe that the man is a vampire, a leap in logic that reminds readers how young and impressionable Bud really is, even if he is mature for his age.



Bud puts his resources and knowledge to the test again by tricking the man into leaving him alone with his car. He hatches and executes a plan to take off with the car to keep from being a victim of yet another powerful adult. After everything he's been through with the Amoses, he knows now to run at any slight suggestion of violence from a grownup.



That Bud is unable to get very far does not change the fact that he thinks really well on his feet and knows how to flee danger, when necessary. Besides, though Bud is unable to drive, he still takes steps to ward off the adult "vampire."



Bud threatens the vampire to give an air of maturity and power that the man may not easily see from his tiny, disheveled frame.



Bud asks the man to show him his teeth, and the man does. Finally, he explains that he has to get the blood to a hospital in Flint for an operation. So, Bud finally unlocks the driver's door—though he also opens his side of the car in case “[the man] had any tricks up his sleeve.”

The man's explanation assuages Bud's fears. Though he may not trust the man completely, Bud still remains hopeful that the man may be his best shot to Grand Rapids especially since his explanation of the blood in the car makes sense. Nevertheless, Bud remains vigilant and again has a plan to escape should he need to.



On the way to Flint, the man asks Bud questions about his family, so Bud tells him that his mother is dead and that his father is “Herman E. Calloway.” The man is surprised at first but, tells Bud that everyone knows his father. The man even notes the resemblance between them. Bud agrees with him and tells the man that people “say [he's] the spitting image of [his] old man.”

Bud tells the man about himself as they drive, perhaps because he is tired of being on his toes in front of adults all the time. It is also possible that Bud continues to talk about Herman E. Calloway being his father because the more he says it, the truer it feels. Thus, it is a huge boost in confidence when the man speaks of Bud's resemblance to his “father.”



Bud asks the man for the rest of the food. The man gives it to him and introduces himself as Mr. Lewis, or Lefty. He tells Bud to call him Mr. Lewis since Bud is still so young. Lefty teases Bud by asking him if anyone has ever referred to him as a “little peanut-head.” He's disappointed though when he thinks Bud does not understand that he's teasing him.

Bud and Lefty continue to learn about each other, and Lefty's teasing suggests that he's genuinely fond of the boy. This is Bud's first significant relationship with an adult in the book that is not strained or abusive but rather characterized by lightness and fun.



Soon, Lefty Lewis asks Bud to share the soda but notices that Bud has backwashed quite a bit, so he hands it back to him, noting that it's “nothing personal.”

Again, Lefty has a penchant for teasing, which suggests that he has taken an immediate liking to Bud, despite Bud's wariness towards him.



The man asks Bud if he's tired, and Bud realizes that he can pretend to fall asleep to avoid answering more questions. So, the man tells him to get some sleep and gives him his jacket to use as a blanket.

Bud decides to pretend to be asleep so that he does not continue to give up all the information he has up his sleeve.



Bud believes he's safe because he's “never heard of a vampire that could drive a car and [he'd] never seen one that had such a good sense of humor.” So, Bud falls asleep to the scent of the jacket's “spice and soap,” and the sound of the frogs.

Bud feels good in Lefty's company—enough to actually fall asleep and trust that he will wake up in the right place. This is a huge departure from his usual distrust of adults.



Bud wakes up with the sensation like he's "at the bottom of a well that someone had filled with tons of thick chocolate pudding. He hears a woman calling his name but remembers that "rule 29" states that when one wakes up with people around them, they should pretend to be asleep until they can figure out what's going on. So, Bud pretends to be asleep and listens to someone tell the woman that he was walking from Grand Rapids to Flint. With that he remembers he was with Lefty Lewis.

With his eyes still shut, Bud listens to the conversation and hears the woman refer to Lefty Lewis as "Poppa." The woman pulls back the blanket they put over Bud, and Bud is embarrassed to realize that he is in a bed and his "knickers" are off—they must have partially undressed him before tucking him into bed. He thinks he will have to pretend to be asleep even longer until he figures "a way out of being so embarrassed."

Bud continues listening, trying to learn something about his dad, Herman E. Calloway. Eventually he pieces together that his father "was married to someone before he married [his] mom." Bud also learns from Lefty Lewis that Herman E. Calloway has "got a reputation for being no-nonsense." Lefty also mentions the possibility of Bud having a "half-sister," that's probably "full-grown by now."

The woman finally wakes Bud up with the promise of food, and Bud gets up and greets her and Lefty. Lefty teases the woman—who is, in fact, his daughter—about her food and teases Bud for his peanut-shaped head again, earning a smack from his daughter.

The woman introduces herself as Mrs. Sleet. She tells Bud to go wash up while she gets him clothes that no longer fit her son. She also tells him she has a special breakfast of pancakes, sausages, toast, and orange juice that he can have as he meets Kim and Scott Sleet.

When Bud comes out of the bathroom, he sees Mrs. Sleet has put new clothes on the bed for him. Because they are slightly too big, Bud rolls them up and is happy to have his "first pair of trousers."

When Bud wakes up, instead of panicking since he doesn't know where he is, he uses the opportunity to listen in on Lefty's conversation with a woman to find out more information about his whereabouts before giving himself away. Bud is especially wary of who the adults in the room may be and what they might want from him, so he decides to bide his time until he can figure everything out.



As Bud becomes more aware of the adults' dynamic, he also becomes more conscious of how vulnerable he is in their presence as he realizes that some of his clothes are off. This is hard for Bud to grapple with since he always tries to portray himself as a strong person in the presence of adults.



Bud is even more intent on listening to the conversation when it turns to his "father." Bud is able to learn about Herman and a possible half-sister, which is probably an exciting moment for him as it means he may have more than one living family member.



Lefty seems to enjoy teasing everyone, including his daughter and Bud, almost like Bud really belongs in their household—despite being only a visitor.



Bud finds out that Mrs. Sleet is not like the other adults in his life, but someone who genuinely wants him to feel as home with her family, however briefly they'll be in each other's company.



Mrs. Sleet's kindness remains consistent, and she gifts Bud with his first pair of trousers. The gesture is not lost on Bud, who has had a hard life of struggle that has meant that gifts like trousers are incredibly rare.



Bud uses his nose to find the food; he notices that the Sleet's have a whole room dedicated to eating. One of the two children at the table gives Bud a look that sizes him up. Shortly after, Lefty Lewis introduces his grandchildren, Kim and Scott Sleet, as his "favorite"—and only—grandkids.

Bud is impressed by the luxuries the Sleet's have in their home and their dining room. It shows how conscious Bud is of class and what money can afford someone. He also meets Mrs. Sleet's children and Lefty's grandchildren and suddenly he is no longer the only child who has to hold his own in front of the adults.



Bud introduces himself to Kim and Scott as "Bud, not Buddy." When Lefty Lewis leaves the table, the boy asks Bud if he ran away from home. Because Bud takes too long to answer, the boy asks if he ran because his father beat him, prompting Bud to respond truthfully that his "daddy never laid a hand on [him] in his life." The boy presses Bud for more information, so Bud responds that he ran away simply because he "didn't like where [he] was."

Bud introduces himself to the kids as Bud instead of Buddy because it is the name his mother gave him, which again reminds him of her love for him. The children, meanwhile, find Bud's presence in their home curious and Scott presses Bud for information about his family. Unlike the measured and careful way he speaks with adults, Bud finds himself opening up truthfully to the kids, much like he did with Deza in Hooverville.



Afterwards, Kim tells Bud that the sausages will be coming out soon and they're going to share the food with Bud because Mrs. Sleet said that Bud is their "special guest." Kim asks him if she's treating him nicely and he responds that she is, so she makes a deal with him. She'll sing him a song for the chance to ask him a question that he has to answer truthfully.

Mrs. Sleet's concern for Bud is evident when she makes sure he is having a good time in her family's company. Again, like her father, she is not like other adults that Bud has grown accustomed to dealing with. She encourages Bud not to feel like he is a burden on them. Meanwhile Kim takes over for her brother and decides to get to the bottom of Bud's story.



Kim sings, and Bud thinks it's horrible. After she finishes, she asks Bud how his mother died and Bud wonders who told her that in the first place. He responds that Momma "got sick [and] died real fast"—so fast that she didn't even have time to close her eyes. Kim responds by wishing that "her mother never dies." Soon after, Bud tells her that "everybody's got to die [and that] it's not sad unless they do it real slow and suffer." Kim and Scott are surprised by this.

Bud has to—again—talk about his mother's death. It seems like he wishes Kim didn't know about it so he wouldn't have to explain how it happened yet again. However, he is a good guest, so he talks about how his mother died and reflects in a sober and mature way that everyone will die, but not everyone will suffer—which is a blessing in its own way. His words are shockingly wise for a child and for that reason take the other kids by surprise.



Mrs. Sleet returns with what Bud assumes are sausages. Then after Kim and Scott say grace, people start passing the plates. Bud watches to see how much food everyone takes so he can mimic them. He also watches how much the children put on their fork as they eat.

During the meal, Bud is both part of the family and an outsider. He feels like he doesn't quite fit in and has to watch the others closely to not draw attention to himself so that they forget he doesn't belong.



Bud notices that it's harder to eat with the Sleet's because they talk a lot and they want him to talk too. This is hard for Bud because the **Home** taught him to eat quietly after grace. He notices that the Sleet's laugh a lot too.

Bud has a hard time acting like he belongs because the Sleet's seem to have a familiar rhythm with each other while they eat. Bud has never had a chance to learn this happy way of "eating" because of his time at the Home.



As they all talk, Mrs. Sleet mentions “redcaps,” so Kim asks her mother to explain what a “redcap” is to Bud. She explains that redcaps “load” trains and carry people’s luggage to their cars; she reveals that her father is one while her husband is a Pullman Porter, meaning he attends to the clients on the train.

The breakfast is also an opportunity for learning, something Bud loves to do. He learns from Mrs. Sleet and Kim about redcaps and Pullman porters, which expands Bud’s knowledge of trains in general.



Towards the end of the breakfast, Lefty Lewis teases Mrs. Sleet about her cooking again, prompting her to smack him on the head once more.

Again, teasing is a huge part of the Lewis-Sleet household. They give Bud something to laugh about and feel a part of.



CHAPTER 12

After breakfast, Bud and Lefty Lewis say goodbye to the Sleets and go to the car to prepare to depart. Bud notices that the blood is missing, and Lefty Lewis tells him he dropped it off at the Hurly hospital while Bud slept. He also tells him he sent a telegram to the “Log Cabin” that Herman E. Calloway apparently owns to let him know Bud is okay.

Bud and Lefty leave the Sleets and Bud again turns his attention towards finding his permanent family in Herman. He is closer than he’s ever been, and Lefty’s telegram means that now Herman may even be expecting him as well.



On their way out of Flint, just as they are passing the “Welcome to Flint” sign, a siren goes off. Bud looks out and sees police, so he’s sure they’ve finally “found” him.

Bud is worried about the police and how they may keep him from achieving his goal of finding his family.



Lefty Lewis tells Bud to listen “very carefully” to what he tells Bud. Bud thinks this makes Lefty Lewis sound like he’s on the run too. This makes Bud remember “rule 8,” whenever adults say something like this, “do not listen, [but] run as fast as you can [...] especially if the cops are chasing you.”

Bud prepares to run even as Lefty coaches him to do something else. Though Bud may trust Lefty, he still thinks he knows the best course of action for himself, and he is not afraid to act on it, regardless of Lefty’s request.



Lefty Lewis tells Bud to put the box next to him under Bud’s seat. After Bud does this, he tells Bud to remain in the car silently. Bud stays but plans to make “a break for it.” After 10 seconds, he’ll take his **suitcase** and run to a nearby building.

Bud hides a mysterious—and suspect—box for Lefty and remains in the car, but he continues to plan an escape if necessary. Again, he’ll do what’s best for himself and his suitcase, his most prized possession, regardless of what an adult advises him to do.



Bud counts to 10 a few times but is unable to leave. By this time the police and Lefty Lewis are “standing at the door.” The police officer asks to see the trunk of the car and Lefty Lewis obliges. Afterwards, the officer asks Bud what’s in the **suitcase**, and Lefty responds that it’s just the things Bud took with him for his visit to Flint from Grand Rapids.

However, Bud does not seem to be able to leave Lefty—especially with a police officer. Bud’s hesitation suggests that he may truly care for Lefty. Besides Lefty has his back when the police officer turns his attention to Bud’s suitcase, which proves Lefty’s loyalty as well. They are a united front, Lefty and Bud, and at least for a brief moment.



After he frees them from the search, the police officer reveals that he is stopping unknown cars in case labor organizers are coming in from Detroit. Back on the highway, Bud asks what a labor organizer is, prompting a conversation about unions with Lefty Lewis. Lefty tells him a union is like a family that tries “to make things better for themselves and their children.”

Lefty Lewis then tells Bud to open up his box. Bud is hesitant and is unsure if he wants to know what lies inside. He yawns and tells Lefty he better sleep instead but Lefty insists, asking him to promise never to “breathe a word about what [he] see[s].”

Again, Bud tells Lefty he’ll rather take a nap, but Lefty continues to insist. Bud begins raising the lid of the box, but Lefty asks him to promise him out loud that he’ll never tell anyone. Bud finally opens the box and sees only paper. He looks underneath for a pistol but finds nothing. He asks Lefty how paper can be dangerous.

Lefty encourages him to read and so he does. Bud reads that an organization called the Brotherhood of Pullman Porters will hold an info meeting on Wednesday July 23, 1936. The letter calls for the reader to keep the information confidential.

Bud asks Lefty if he is one of the labor organizers, but Lefty responds with a “not really.” He picked up the flyers in Flint so they can hand them out in Grand Rapids because the only place that could print the flyers is in Flint.

After, Lefty explains about the “trouble” the policeman hinted at. He describes a sit-down strike to Bud (when workers show up but don’t work so new workers can’t be brought in). He tells Bud that this scares factory bosses.

Later, Bud wakes up from a nap and Lefty points to the landscape outside and asks Bud if things look familiar. Bud lies that they do. Shortly afterwards they begin to approach what Bud assumes is the Log Cabin. He notices, according to a sign (“...HERMAN E. CALLOWAY AND THE NUBIAN KNIGHTS OF THE NEW DEAL”), that his father has joined a new band.

Bud again gets a hint of how the economic struggle throughout the country is bringing people together in new ways. He learns that unions are a family that have each other’s back and make sure their family’s needs are met.



Bud becomes apprehensive of finding out more information about Lefty’s life, and he tries to dodge Lefty’s request by falling asleep, the technique used to he avoid conversation with Lefty when they first met.



Bud again gets a sense of the interior world of the economic crisis as he reads what the flyers say. Bud is also relieved to find out that there is no danger inside the box. Though he trusts Lefty, he has not completely stopped being skeptical of adults.



The “Brotherhood of Pullman Porters” highlights the link between economic troubles and family—one’s “family” during hard economic times seems to be based more on shared hardship than shared blood.



Bud becomes interested in Lefty’s role in the labor movement and perhaps even begins to respect him a little more for his willingness to skirt the rules and act strategically.



Bud learns more about strikes and factories and workers and it all feels like a new world to Bud. Again, Bud is beginning to realize the different types of communities and families that exist within their economically troubled world.



Bud sleeps and wakes up in Lefty’s presence yet again, cementing Lefty as a trustworthy adult figure. Finally, Bud arrives at his “father’s” place and like many times before, Bud is quick to take note of information he finds interesting or important that he can use to his advantage.



Lefty pulls up to Herman's car, the "Packard," and notes that Herman is inside. Bud, thinking quickly, tries to convince Lefty to let him go in to talk to his father alone. Lefty, after some hesitation, makes a deal with Bud: Lefty will hang on to Bud's **suitcase** and leave him to talk to his father for five minutes. He'll then bring Bud's suitcase in for him once the time is up.

Bud makes Lefty promise not to look inside his bag. Lefty does, so Bud enters the Log Cabin. He sees another set of doors but instead of pushing them and going further in, he waits in the dark. After, he goes back outside to retrieve his **suitcase** from Lefty, pretending he's already spoken to Herman. Acting on Herman's behalf, Bud tells Lefty "thank you," for his help.

Lefty makes Bud promise that before he runs again, he'll go to the train station and ask for him first so that they can "talk before [he] set[s] out on [his] own again." Lefty then tells Bud to say hello to Herman for him and hands Bud his **suitcase**. Bud waves until he sees the car enter the street. Then he turns around and enters both set of doors to the Log Cabin.

Bud sees six men seating in a circle and notes that one of them is white. He sees the one "who had to be [his] father [...] sitting with his back to Bud." Bud listens to him lie and do some good exaggerating and notes that this is enough proof that the guy is his father. Soon after, he sees the man take his hat off and thinks he's shaved his head like Bud has always wanted to, providing Bud with further proof of their relations.

As Herman recounts to his audience a fight that he lost, he says something that convinces Bud even further that they're related: "there comes a time when you're doing something, and you realize it just doesn't make any sense to keep on doing it [...] you understand enough is enough." Bud is sure that "only two folks with the same blood would think them just alike!" So, Bud walks into the light of the Log Cabin's stage.

Bud, the quick thinker that he is, convinces Lefty to let him talk to his "father," by himself. Again, Bud thinks that by outsmarting Lefty, he can minimize the amount of trouble he'll be in. Lefty, however, does have the foresight to hang on to Bud's suitcase. Like other adults before, he is able to sense the huge importance that Bud places on it and the items inside. It is a type of insurance for adults so that Bud does what they want him to do.



Bud follows through on his end of the deal, at least as far as Lefty knows. In reality, Bud simply makes Lefty think that he talked to his father so that he can get his suitcase back and ensure Lefty leaves before he realizes that Bud lied. Nevertheless, though Bud pretends that his words of thanks are from his "father," he seems to really appreciate and be thankful of Lefty's help and company.



Lefty's final message to Bud suggests that this will not be the last time that they see each other. It also suggests that Bud will always have a friend and someone to help him in times of need. Again, Bud's interactions with adults are not all black and white. His relationship with Lefty shows that sometimes, the adults in his life can really want the best for him.



Inside the Log Cabin, Bud is content with watching the band and listening to them to find out information. Bud seems to look for clues that Herman is his father in order to garner the confidence he needs to reveal himself to Herman and the band. This means that all of Herman's movements become clues that they're related because Bud wants to believe it so badly.



Bud is desperate to believe he and Herman are related, so Bud takes it as a sign that the man thinks of fights in a similar way to how Bud did as he fought Todd Amos. With this insight, Bud has all the evidence he needs so he reveals himself.



The “horn guy” named Jimmy asks if “Miss Thomas,” sent him, but Bud ignores him and keeps walking to see his father’s face. He is surprised to see that his father’s face is “real old,” like the “horn guy,” almost “too old.” Bud remains sure, however, that this man has to be his father.

Bud ignores the questions about Miss Thomas because he is so focused on Herman. However, he is not prepared to see how old Herman is, suggesting that he doesn't align with what Bud has imagined his father would look like. Bud pushes through the doubts that spring up once he realizes Herman may be “too old” to be his father because he has come too far to turn back around and find a new dream.



Bud tells them that he doesn’t know a Miss Thomas and that he’s here to meet his father. The men think he’s referring to the drummer but Bud points to Herman and says, “You know it’s you.” Herman stops smiling and appraises Bud. Bud is glad he can’t cry anymore so these men won’t think he’s a baby. He addresses Herman again and says, “I know it’s you.”

Bud's boldness takes the band by surprise. Instead of backing down, however, Bud faces Herman, almost like he's just another adult in the room, and brazenly tells Herman that he is his father. He refuses to back down and shows that none of the men in the room can intimidate him.



CHAPTER 13

The men get very quiet. Jimmy asks Bud if his name is Bud, and when Bud says yes eagerly, Jimmy connects his name to the “crazy telegram” from the morning.

The men are stunned by the revelation—though Bud continues to hold his own, almost daring them to deny the veracity of his statement.



Meanwhile, Herman is confused and chastises Bud for “accusing folks of being [his] father.” He then asks Bud where his mother is, and Bud tells him she is dead. Herman tells Bud that while he’s sorry to hear that, “it’s obvious that Bud is a disturbed young man,” that doesn’t “have a clue who [his] father is.” Despite this, Bud continues to insist that he “belongs to [Herman] now.”

Herman takes a deep disliking to Bud for daring to come into his domain and accuse him of something he is not. He tries to wrestle control of the situation from Bud by suggesting that Bud is only a “disturbed” young child, but Bud refuses to let Herman make him doubt his conviction. He continues to insist that he is right, and Herman is wrong.



Jimmy tells Bud that someone must be worried about him in Flint, but Bud tells them he doesn’t have anyone there. When Jimmy asks Bud if he lives in an orphanage, Bud tries to explain that he’s on the run and begins to explain the Amoses and the cops, but Jimmy eventually waves him away to wait by the stage. Bud thinks about how he can make a quick exit while he waits and notes that he’ll have to leave through the same door he came in.

Bud does not plan on going back to his life of loneliness and hardship in Flint. He tries to explain this to Jimmy to give him a sense of what he can't go back to, but Bud's story seems to be too much for Jimmy. He stops Bud before Bud can really talk about the extent of his hard life. Bud characteristically begins making plans about escaping, should the need arise. Again, Bud doesn't trust most adults he comes into contact with, family or not.



He hears Herman tell Jimmy that this is Jimmy's "little red wagon" to pull how he wants before Jimmy calls him over. Jimmy then makes a deal with Bud and tells Bud that in exchange for food at a place called Sweet Pea, Bud has to tell the truth. When Bud asks him what Sweet Pea is, Jimmy tells him it's the "best restaurant in Grand Rapids," so Bud agrees to the deal.

Herman loudly interjects and says he doesn't want to hear Bud's story as he's eating, lights a pipe, and walks out. Bud wishes his father wasn't Herman, but Lefty Lewis or Jimmy since Herman seems so difficult.

Jimmy introduces Bud to the rest of the bandmates: the Thug, Dirty Deed (the only white band member), Doo-Doo Bug, and Steady Eddie. He tells them to make Bud feel comfortable.

Jimmy tells them that Bud will go with them for dinner, and he and Herman will come separately. The "sax man," Steady Eddie, then gets Bud to help him grab his saxophone case to bring to the Buick; he tells him to be careful with his "bread and butter," because he needs it to make money.

The trombone player, Doo Doo Bug, tells Bud to not address them as "sir," since they're not as old as Jimmy or his "long-lost dear old daddy." They laugh and then all of them take turns advising Bud to show Herman more affection. The Thug tells Bud to hug him, call him daddy and kiss him at the Sweet Pea. Bud, however, decides to ignore the advice. Steady Eddie emphasizes that Bud should pay no mind to The Thug and tells Bud to instead give Herman his space for a while.

Bud accidentally lets it slip to the band that he thinks his father is a "mean old coot" and realizes he shouldn't have said it. "Rule 63" is "never say something bad about someone you don't know—especially when you're around a bunch of strangers."

The Thug pretends to write down what Bud said, but Steady Eddie chastises him and tells him that he and Bud are "too dang hungry to hear any more of [his] lip." Bud realizes that Steady Eddie is his favorite.

Jimmy does not find Bud's presence as annoying as Herman does. So, he allows Bud to come with them to the Sweet Pea, to feed Bud while collecting information from him. Bud, never one to turn down a free meal, happily accepts.



Herman at first is angry that Bud will be joining them, but he seems to resign himself to the boy's presence by not putting up too much of a fight. It is a small victory for Bud, though he wishes that Herman wasn't so "difficult."



Bud meets the other members of Herman's Band family, so he feels comfortable eating with them.



Bud is spared from riding with Herman to dinner. While Herman immediately sees Bud as a nuisance, Steady Eddie appears to develop a liking for Bud immediately. He asks Bud for help in order to bring Bud into the fold and make him feel useful.



The others in the band also do their best to make Bud feel welcome in the only way they know how: through teasing. Bud does not seem to mind much, maybe because Lefty prepared him for it. Besides, he is smart enough to know not to take them too seriously. Steady Eddie meanwhile gives Bud advice that will help him navigate their group and keep Herman out of his way for the time being.



Bud uncharacteristically makes a careless mistake in front of the new adults in the room by not following one of his important rules. The mistake makes him feel vulnerable in front of them.



The band teases Bud, but Steady Eddie again comes to Bud's rescue and makes Bud feel as if his mistake is not as serious as he thought. Bud, as a result, is grateful for Steady Eddie's presence and help.



After loading the instruments, Bud gets in the car and The Thug asks Bud how he found out that Herman is his father. Bud tells them that his mother told him. The Thug asks if his mother was “as old as sand,” when she gave birth to Bud. Bud responds that she was but later reveals that she was 20 when she had him and 26 when she died. No one talks after that until they get to Sweet Pea.

When they get to Sweet Pea, Steady Eddie tells Bud that he’s a “tough little nut” that doesn’t cry like “most folks his age.” Bud tells them that his eyes “don’t cry no more,” and Steady Eddie tells him that that sounds like “a great name for a song.” Steady Eddie also reassures Bud not to worry too much about The Thug. From there, Doo-Doo Bug tells them it’s time to “stuff [their] craws.”

CHAPTER 14

Bud sees that the inside of the restaurant resembles a living room with “ten card tables and some folding chairs.” He and the group skip the line to the restaurant and Bud notices that the inside smells like “heaven.”

Bud sees Herman and Jimmy sitting at a table with a woman. He sees there’s one more table reserved for “NBC,” which Steady Eddie says stands for “Nobody But Calloway” because it’s too hard to keep up with the band’s frequent name changes.

Jimmy calls Bud over and introduces him to Miss Thomas, the band’s “vocal stylist.” She explains that this means she’s the singer. She sticks her hand out and Bud notices her diamond rings. Then she peers closer and asks Bud about the bites on his cheek, concerned. Bud tells her about the hornet stings from the Amoses locking him up in a shed, and she is horrified.

Next, Bud shows her the bite from the fish heads on his hand and Miss Thomas chastises the men at the table for not noticing the cut is infected. Herman tells Miss Thomas to “talk to James” (Jimmy), because “he’s the one who looked at the kid.”

Bud reveals to the band that his mother died when he was six, which makes the band feel sorry for him. Although they just met him, they seem to generally feel concern for him—and they show this by respecting his pain and not asking any more questions.



Steady Eddie is the first one to congratulate Bud for surviving the trauma of seeing his mother die, validating Bud’s maturity. Moreover, Steady Eddie and Bud seem to get along not as an adult and a child, but as true friends. Bud even gives him an idea for a new song, hinting that Bud may be a more natural fit with the band than he initially seems.



Bud takes in his surroundings, trying to take all the sights and smells of Sweet Pea in so that he knows what to expect.



The phrase “Nobody But Calloway” is fitting because it also speaks to Herman’s character as a whole. His interactions with Bud so far have shown that Herman is used to being in control and calling the shots.



When Bud meets Miss Thomas, he is taken aback by her glamor, but also by her seemingly genuine concern for him. She is one of those few adults that make Bud feel comfortable from the beginning and get him to open up honestly and openly.



Miss Thomas continues to show concern for Bud, even noticing what everyone else has failed to.



Next, Bud explains the cut under his eye and describes Todd shoving a pencil all the way up his nose. He explains they fought afterwards. He hopes Herman is listening to him as he explains that he “fell down,” during the fight because the “Lord [gave him] the good sense to know when enough is enough.” Bud then tells them more about the Amoses and the shed.

Miss Thomas eventually asks about Bud’s “momma,” and Bud tells her Momma died four years ago. When she asks about his daddy, Bud points to Herman. Though Miss Thomas wants to smile, she tells Bud it’s rude to point. So, Bud apologizes to her and then to Herman.

Herman gets up and goes to the other table to ask if one of the other band members will switch seats with him. Steady Eddie eventually beats the others and volunteers to sit with Bud because “he’s got the look of a future sax man about him.”

Meanwhile, Miss Thomas asks Bud if she can order supper for him. Tyla, the woman who comes to attend to them, jokes that the Herman’s band mates are getting “younger” every day. Eventually she apologizes for “mistaking Bud for a musician.”

Miss Thomas orders meat loaf, okra, mashed potatoes, and apple cider for Bud and orders the same thing for herself. Bud is amazed to see Jimmy and Steady Eddie order different things and thinks about “rich folks” that “[go] to restaurants once a week.”

Miss Thomas tells Bud that Herman can’t be his father and suggests that because Herman is famous, Bud may have misunderstood if his mother said something about Herman reminding her of his true father. Bud disagrees. However, it is hard for him to explain why he thinks Herman is his father out loud, though “Herman E. Calloway being [his] father [...] made real good sense” to Bud.

Luckily, Tyla returns to their table with a tray of food, so Miss Thomas reassures Bud that they’ll talk tomorrow. Bud is happy because “tomorrow” means that they won’t “send [him] back to Flint right away.”

Bud continues telling Miss Thomas about his struggles at the hands of the Amoses because he trusts her with this information, but also because he wants Herman to see that they share some characteristics that prove that they are related. Like his “father,” Bud is a fighter, so he wants Herman to see that.



Bud again insists that Herman is his father, even though no one seems to believe him. Despite this and Herman’s obvious rejections, Bud is still fully convinced that the man is his father.



Herman meanwhile finds Bud increasingly intolerable. He changes his seat without another word to Bud or Miss Thomas, desperate to get away from Bud. Steady Eddie, however, does not mind taking his boss’s seat as he genuinely seems to want to get to know Bud more, as a person and perhaps as a future musician.



Tyla’s joke that Bud is the newest member of the band suggests that Bud fits in well with the group, despite Herman’s attempts to make him feel unwanted.



Bud is exposed to luxuries he didn’t know could exist, watching the band order whatever they want for supper instead of standing in line for hours at the mission for a bowl of oatmeal and a piece of bread like Bud has had to do.



Though Miss Thomas takes a liking to Bud, she tries to convince Bud that he is mistaken about the identity of his father. Bud, however, denies that his mother only suggested that his father was Herman—though, of course, Bud’s mother never told Bud as much either.



Bud is happy that at least he won’t have to return to Flint and the Home immediately, though his future with the band is still tenuous.



After Bud eats, he believes the meal is the best meal he's ever had. Afterwards, Tyla brings him dessert that he mistakenly thinks she calls "On the House," when in reality it's sweet potato pie.

When Bud is done eating, he looks up and thinks that Miss Thomas is the most beautiful woman he's ever seen. Moreover, her humming reminds Bud of the sensation of feeling a "train coming right through the bottoms of your feet." Bud begins to understand why the word *singer* is not enough for Miss Thomas.

At the table, Bud also notices how funny Jimmy is and how his stories of his travels with Herman make everyone at their table and outside their table laugh. He notices it is only Herman's table that is quiet.

Bud also notices how Steady Eddie looks when Tyla comes around, and how he always has a toothpick in his mouth. Steady Eddie even shows him how to play a pretend saxophone.

All at once, Bud makes a discovery about himself. He realizes that out of all the places he's been, he is finally where he belongs. Bud refuses to let Herman "scare [him] out of this," and before he knows it, he starts to cry.

Bud is embarrassed as he notices everyone is looking at him. He feels as if he's blown his opportunity to make a good first impression. Bud puts his face in his arms and the napkin over his head to hide his tears and shame. Miss Thomas takes him and puts him on her knees, bouncing him there. Bud tries to keep the napkin over his face as she does. She soothes him and starts humming to him. He feels either her lips or her hands whisper to him to "Go ahead and cry," because "[he's] home."

As an orphan living in the midst of the Great Depression, Bud hasn't had many, if any, opportunities to eat so indulgently.



Bud finds Miss Thomas incredibly beautiful and captivating, a feeling that is no doubt heightened by the joy he feels from sharing a meal with his new friends.



Bud begins to notice how much Jimmy's humor adds to the ambience of the room and the meal and he feels grateful to have Jimmy by his side.



Bud is studying everyone so much that he even notices how Steady Eddie looks at Tyla, in a way that suggests romantic history. He also notices Eddie's cool mannerisms and how intent he is that Bud gets familiar with the saxophone. It makes Bud feel like he belongs.



All these feelings make Bud feel overwhelmingly grateful for the comradery he has been able to find with the band within such a short time. He knows beyond a doubt that this is where he belongs, even if it's not the traditional family he's been dreaming about. It seems like Bud no longer feels like he has to look out for himself as an adult because he trusts that these people can do that for him now. So, he lets himself be a child and cry like a child for the first time in a long time.



Bud worries about what the band will think of him now that he's crying. After all, he can no longer pretend to be such a tough, mature, wise boy. However, Miss Thomas puts him on her knees, a gesture that lets him know that it is okay for him to be a child and let his feelings out. She gives him the sense that he belongs with them now, and that they are his new home.



CHAPTER 15

Miss Thomas introduces Bud to “Grand Calloway Station,” just as she parks the car in front of a big house. Bud grabs his **suitcase** and asks her about the name of the house. She says that Herman named it after the New York City Grand Central Station.

They walk in and Miss Thomas takes Bud to where he’ll be sleeping. Bud sees a chair, a little table, and a picture with a “skinny little black horse” on it in the room. She tells Bud that Herman needs to clear out the closet and tells him to put his **suitcase** on the table.

Miss Thomas tells Bud where her room, Herman’s room, and the bathroom all are. She is about to leave when Bud asks her if the closet doors are locked. She tells him they aren’t but reassures him all that’s in the closet are “girl’s clothes and toys.”

Bud asks about whether the girl will be annoyed that he’s in her room and Miss Thomas tells Bud the girl is gone. He remembers “rule 28” of his guide and knows that “Gone=dead!” Bud becomes scared of staying in the room of a dead little girl. He realizes he won’t sleep very well. Shortly after, Miss Thomas tells him she’ll see him in the morning and leaves.

Bud uses the chair to push against one of the closet’s doorknobs, but a conversation between Miss Thomas and Herman interrupts Bud. Bud hopes Herman wins so he can sleep somewhere else.

Herman enters the room angrily, but Bud isn’t worried because he sees Miss Thomas. Herman takes out a key and locks both closet doors. He tells Bud that Bud doesn’t fool him and that he’s going to send Bud “back where [he] belong[s].” Herman slams the door on his way out but comes back in to warn Bud not to steal anything because he’ll know it if Bud does. Then he slams the door again.

Bud becomes a member of Herman’s household for the night, which brings Bud closer to earning a permanent place for himself and his belongings within the band.



Bud examines the room he’ll be sleeping in, perhaps looking for clues about who the room belonged to in the past.



Miss Thomas, intent on making Bud feel at home, goes through the trouble of letting him know how to find her or any person or room he may need during his stay. Bud listens, though curious as ever, his attention wanders to what may be behind the closet doors in the absent girl’s room.



Bud learns that the girl in question is “gone,” which makes him think that he is going to be staying in a dead girl’s bedroom. His assumption that “Gone=dead” hints that adults may have worded his mother’s passing in a similar way to him, so now he treats the words as synonymous.



This passage is a rare reminder of how young Bud really is, as he naively uses a chair to somehow protect himself from the clothes and toys in the closet, which he finds scary and threatening given that they belonged to the “gone” girl.



Bud’s hope that Herman will be of service to him quickly dies when Herman storms into the room and locks the closet doors, accusing Bud of being a thief. He does not trust Bud at all and feels as if the boy has an ulterior motive that he must get to the bottom of.



Bud thinks that Herman sounds like a white lifeguard he remembers from the YMCA who used to warn the kids from the **Home** not to pee in the pool unless they wanted to be severely burned, claiming that they added some “new kind of magical chemical in the water” that burns all those who dare to urinate in the water. The lifeguard would also tell the kids—whom he addressed as “you people”—that if they did urinate in the pool, they would get locked up in jail and be banned from swimming anywhere else in the world.

Bud thinks Herman shouldn't worry because he's a “liar, not a thief.” He's only ever stolen food from a garbage can. Bud wonders how “someone who was so suspicious could ever be kin to [him].” He thinks that “even a hard-up thief wouldn't find” anything to steal in a dead girl's room. He notes that the “best thing in the whole room” was a wall full of pictures of horses from magazines.

Bud thinks that there's something valuable in the closet—though he can't get inside. Instead, he looks inside a drawer and sees only thumbtacks and pencils. Bud goes back and “flops” on the bed and is pleasantly surprised to find it's really soft with two sheets like “Toddy boy's.”

Bud no longer feels scared of the girl who “kicked the bucket” and instead feels at home and content. He's too tired to get under the two sheets but he even hears his mother's voice before falling asleep. He realizes he is no longer afraid of any possible monsters because “nothing could hurt [him] now.”

CHAPTER 16

Bud wakes up and immediately notices the horses on the wall again. He also realizes that his shirt is off and that he is under the sheets with his pants off. Bud is sure he undressed himself, which explains why he was “sleeping so hard.” He realizes that rich people must sleep with two sheets because it puts them out like a baby.

The white lifeguard at the YMCA treated the kids from the Home as criminals and dehumanized them by calling them “you people.” Herman is similarly criminalizing Bud and expecting the worst from him.



Even though he's young, Bud knows himself enough to know that he is not a thief. Plus, he doesn't see anything that's worth stealing, which raises the question of why Herman is so protective of the room and its contents.



In locking the closet, Herman piques Bud's interest, convincing him that there is something valuable within it. However, Bud does not want to discover what lies inside because he feels content to be where he is, under two soft sheets.



Bud is so happy to have a warm, clean place to sleep that he ceases being worried about the dead girl. He feels truly safe as if he is in his mother's arms again falling asleep to her voice.



Bud wakes up and takes in his surroundings in case anything has changed while he slept. In a moment that harkens back to Bud waking up without his “knickers” after being tucked in at Mrs. Sleet's house, Bud realizes his clothes are off and is too embarrassed to accept that someone may have undressed him and tucked him in, so he convinces himself that it was his own doing. Bud is accustomed to being in control and manipulating the adults around him, so to be treated as a young child—being helped out of his day clothes and tucked into bed—makes Bud feel vulnerable and embarrassed.



Bud sees clothes folded, and it reminds him of his mother. He eyes get “stingey” when he thinks of her and the notes she would leave with his folded clothes, but he blinks the tears away. Eventually Bud realizes it was Miss Thomas who did everything, including the undressing.

Bud is on his way to the kitchen when he hears Miss Thomas and Herman arguing about him. Miss Thomas accuses Herman of having “no sympathy” and insists that they are going to stick to their original plan for “that boy.” Herman vows to get Bud’s real story from Flint, while Miss Thomas insists Bud is telling the truth.

Bud rushes back upstairs after he hears Steady Eddie’s voice hinting at a present for him. He loudly closes the door to alert every one of his presence before using the bathroom, closing that door loudly, and walking downstairs.

Bud enters the kitchen and says good morning to everyone. They all respond back, except Herman, who leaves the room shortly after to check on his car, Loudean. Miss Thomas tells Bud he’s slept until noon, and Bud is surprised because he’s never slept for so long before.

Miss Thomas tells Bud that lunch will be ready soon, and Steady Eddie invites him to sit down. Miss Thomas eventually jokingly asks him if his ears were burning last night. Bud is confused, but she explains that “they should’ve been burning because [he was] the subject of a very long conversation last night.”

Miss Thomas tells Bud that she has a proposition for him. She tells him that although they still need to talk to some people in Flint, they would like Bud to stay with them at Grand Calloway Station “for a while,” if Bud agrees. Bud grins back and Miss Thomas takes that as a yes.

Miss Thomas warns Bud, however, that he’s going to have to pull his weight, and that they’re all going to have to be patient with each other. She adds that he’ll especially have to be patient with Herman.

Bud’s mother is the last thing he thinks about when he goes to sleep and one of the first things he thinks about when he wakes up, suggesting that something about this place makes him feel particularly close to her. Meanwhile, Miss Thomas is taking on an increasingly motherly role for Bud, undressing him for bed and tucking him in under the sheets as if he were her own child.



Miss Thomas continues to advocate for Bud even behind closed doors, which suggests that she truly is an ally he can count on to take care of him.



Bud always wants to be in control, so he only lets the band know he is awake—loudly—when he is ready for them to know.



Everyone welcomes Bud once he comes into the room—except Herman, who continues to make his distaste of the boy as obvious as possible. Nevertheless, Bud continues to feel comfortable in the home among the other bandmates.



Miss Thomas, comfortable in her new role as Bud’s caretaker, gives Bud information about his next meal. Steady Eddie also makes Bud feel comfortable by creating space for him at the table.



Miss Thomas tells Bud that they want Bud to stay with them for an indefinite amount of time, which is music to Bud’s ears. All he’s ever wanted was for a family to want him, and now he has just that, even though the band family is nontraditional. He also seems to be comfortable with having the family be the other band members rather than Herman, suggesting that he’s no longer pinning all his hopes on having a relationship with his “father.”



Bud and Miss Thomas talk about living expectations to make Bud’s transition into their household as seamless as possible.



Miss Thomas tells him that in September they'll have to figure out Bud's schedule for school. Until then, she tells him that he will accompany them on their travels. She adds at the end that he's a "godsend" to them. She comes closer to him in a way that reminds him of Momma and emphasizes that he shouldn't forget what she's telling him.

Steady Eddie then asks Bud about his **suitcase** and if he's attached to the suitcase itself or just the things inside. Bud thinks for a minute and responds that it's the things "from [his] mother [that] are the most important."

Steady Eddie then gifts Bud with a new case, similar to the ones the other members carry around. Eddie reveals it's his old saxophone case for Bud to carry his things in like the other members of the band. Bud is thrilled. The rest of the band comes into the kitchen for coffee, and Bud shows them his new "**suitcase**" that he'll be taking around with them.

Steady Eddie tells Bud that to be in the band, he'll have to practice for "two hours a day," and he reaches out and gifts Bud a wooden flute. Eddie tells him it's his until he's ready to move on to something more "complicated."

The Thug steps in and says it's time to give Bud a name. Miss Thomas excuses herself from the naming ceremony. On her way out, she hopes the "naming" process is better for Bud than it was for the rest of the band. Bud hands Steady Eddie his recorder and stands up. Steady Eddie then asks Jimmy to proceed with the naming, and Jimmy opens the floor to the band members to name Bud.

Steady Eddie suggests "Sleepy," but it doesn't quite fit, so Doo-Doo Bug suggests "Bone." Eventually The Thug adds "La" to "Bone" to make it sound classier. Steady Eddie eventually finds a compromise by naming Bud "Sleepy LaBone," which according to Bud is the best name he's "ever heard in [his] life."

Miss Thomas also talks to Bud about the future and school, which shows that she intends for Bud to be in their life for the foreseeable future. She also shows her gratitude for Bud in their lives by calling him a "godsend." This intimate moment between them reminds Bud of his mother, though in a way that doesn't make him sad or want to cry. It feels as if he has finally found someone to make the hurt of her absence more bearable.



While Bud has been fiercely protective of his suitcase up until this point, he now decides that it's not the suitcase itself that matters to him—all that matters is the memory of his mother.



The saxophone case is not meant to replace the sentimentality of the suitcase, but to mark a new beginning. The sax case will still hold all of Bud's prized possessions from his past, but it will also symbolize his new place with the band. That way, he will be able to take his old life with him as he settles into his new life, home, and family.



Steady Eddie also gives Bud a new flute, cementing his new place within the band and within the family. With the flute, it truly becomes official: Bud is where he belongs.



The naming ceremony is an opportunity for everyone to participate in Bud's induction into the band and the family. This way everyone feels like they have a stake in Bud's membership in their group. It also is a special moment for Bud who has never had this much fanfare from this many people.



Throughout his life, Bud has been protective of his name—"Bud, not Buddy"—and has considered it central to his identity and even bound up in his memories of his mother. But with a new life and family comes a new name, and Bud is thrilled to have this as a sign of a new beginning.



Jimmy tries the name out and the other band members are in favor of it. Jimmy then asks Bud to get down on one knee, taps him on the head three times with his recorder, and christens him with his new name. Bud is excited and can't wait to "live up to" the name.

The other members of the band are equally thrilled about the name, an even bigger sign for Bud that he truly has found his people. He takes his new place within the home seriously and is thus anxious to prove that he is worthy of his new name and place within the band family.



CHAPTER 17

Bud mops and plays a game with himself with the bucket and soap as the band members load their instruments. Despite Herman trying to work him "like a dog," Bud continues to enjoy doing his chores; he even pretends the mop in the wringer is someone inside a washing machine.

Bud takes great satisfaction from doing helping his new family keep their space clean. He also does not back down from Herman's bullying and continues to rise up to meet Herman's challenges without complaining—Herman, it seems, has finally met his match.



Then the musicians start to play, and Bud notices that The Thug's music sounds like soft rain on someone's roof and Dirty Deed's music like the Niagara Falls. When Steady Eddie plays, Bud thinks it's the most beautiful sound he's ever heard.

Bud becomes interested in the band's music. Each sound strikes a chord in Bud and it makes him feel as if his new family can do no wrong with their instruments.



Miss Thomas arrives with Jimmy and Herman and thanks Bud for doing a great job, but Bud is mesmerized by the playing is unable to respond. Miss Thomas, Jimmy, and Herman then join the band, and Bud has a hard time figuring out which of them sounds the best.

Bud's feelings of love for his new family and their music only intensifies once Jimmy, Herman, and Miss Thomas arrive and the band is complete.



When Miss Thomas starts singing, however, Bud is sure that the rest of the band operates like a storm, while Miss Thomas is the "sun busting through thick, gray clouds."

Bud is especially captivated by Miss Thomas' singing voice. Without her, Bud believes the band family and their music is incomplete, which also speaks to how central Miss Thomas is becoming for Bud's own happiness and well-being.



Miss Thomas talks as she sings, according to Bud, and Steady Eddie uses his saxophone to answer, like a conversation between the two of them (with some interruptions from other band members). When the band ends, Bud drops the mop and claps loudly, noting that he finally understands the six exclamation points in the band's name.

Again, the band's music reinforces the magic and love that Bud finds in their presence. Though he is new, he feels truly honored to be able to hear their music and belong to such a talented family.



CHAPTER 18

Bud and the band get into two cars to their next destination, outside of Grand Rapids. Bud has been living with the band for a week and this will be his third trip with them.

Bud has quickly become an integral member of the band. Wherever they go, he follows.



In the car, The Thug teases Dirty Deed for being white, and Dirty Deed responds that he doesn't mind being the only white member since times are hard for white and black people alike.

This passage is a reminder of both the economic instability and racial division running through the fabric of the country. Dirty Deed suggests that the silver lining of the Depression is that it is somewhat of an equalizer, as everyone is affected by the financial crisis.



Steady Eddie tells Bud that Herman always has a white person in the band for “practical reasons.” Later Dirty Deed explains that it's unlawful for “a Negro to own any property out where the Log Cabin is,” so it had to be put in Dirty Deed's name. Steady Eddie adds that Dirty Deed's presence calms “white folks'” nerves when they hire the band.

Steady Eddie also lets Bud in on how Dirty Deed's role in the band allows Herman to continue to “own” the Log Cabin establishment as a black man. Even though Herman is successful and famous, he is still subject to racist laws and must find creative ways to work around the hurdles they create.



Later, Bud hears the band play again and has to sit on his hands so he doesn't clap loudly. After the show, he sleeps next to the instruments to guard them.

As a member of the band family, Bud takes seriously his job of guarding the band's belongings. Now that they're family, whatever is important to them is important to him, too.



The next day, Bud receives bad news. Herman has decided to stay to catch up with Eugene, an old band member, so Jimmy tells Bud to finish packing things into the Packard. Afterwards, Bud will have to ride with Herman back. Herman responds with a “whatever,” and enters the club with his friend. Bud practices his flute while he waits for Herman.

Bud and Herman have to ride back home together, a revelation that makes Bud sad and Herman even more distant. However, Bud does not take Herman's cold behavior to heart. Instead he focuses on getting better at playing the flute, so he can perform with the band.



Herman eventually comes out and begins kicking stones with his shoe. When Bud approaches him, he asks Bud to “make [himself] useful and help him retrieve a stone. Bud gives him the stone. As they walk towards the car, Bud asks him what he needs the rock for. Once they are in the car, Herman responds, “bad habit,” and then opens the glove box and shows him other rocks with words written on them. Bud notices the writing are of places and dates—just like the rocks from his sax case.

Curious as ever, Bud cannot help but ask Herman what he needs the rock for, looking for a way to understand the man he thinks is his father. Herman reveals that it is part of an old habit of writing on rocks after a show.



Bud tells him that he has rocks that are the same, but Herman misunderstands the meaning of Bud's words, so Bud opens up his saxophone case and takes out his own rocks. He crosses his arms and waits for Herman to ask to see them, but Herman doesn't.

Bud, eager to find a way to connect with Herman, reveals he has similar rocks. He even takes them out, hoping Herman will ask to see them and show interest in him for once.



Eventually they arrive at Grand Calloway Station, and while Jimmy helps them unload, Bud finally shows Herman his rocks. Herman reaches for the rocks and Bud lets him take them even though he usually doesn't allow people to touch them.

Eventually Bud cannot control himself and decides to show Herman his rocks, eager to prove a connection between them. He even lets Herman touch the rocks, a sign of how much Herman's acceptance means to him.



Herman asks where he got the rocks from, but Bud doesn't answer. Instead, he waits for an opportunity to snatch his rocks back because he's sure he can outrun Herman. Herman asks about the rocks again, "sounding meaner than he ever had before," prompting Jimmy to walk over quickly. Jimmy eventually stands between Bud and Herman.

Herman, however, responds angrily as usual, implying that Bud stole the rocks. While Bud is eager to find something to use to connect with Herman, Herman wants the opposite. He looks for ways to distance himself from Bud as much as possible.



Herman accuses Bud of snooping around, and Bud tells him he hasn't been. Herman asks him again where he got the rocks from. Jimmy reads the rocks and sees that they say "Flint, Michigan, August eight, 1911," and "Gary, Indiana, July thirteenth, 1912."

Even with Jimmy's intervention, Herman continues to throw insults at Bud and accuses him of being a thief.



Jimmy asks him where he got the rocks from, and Bud responds he got them from his mother. Jimmy finally asks Bud for his mother's name. Herman begins to accuse Bud of being rude, so Bud screams out that his mother's name is Angela Janet Caldwell.

Jimmy tries to be an arbitrator for Bud and Herman to no avail. Bud becomes more and more upset at Herman's suggestion that he doesn't belong with them. This is the first time that Bud reveals the identity of his mother out loud.



Herman stumbles into the house, "like he'd been struck blind," and Bud confirms that his reaction means Herman is his father. Jimmy tells him he's wrong—he reveals to Bud that Angela Janet was Herman's daughter's name, meaning that Herman could be Bud's grandfather. Bud is overjoyed to receive the news that Herman isn't his father after all.

Herman is left shaken by the news of Bud's mother's identity, which makes Bud feel victorious. He briefly feels like he has finally outsmarted Herman and proven without a doubt that Herman is his father. Jimmy, however, fills in some of the gaps in Bud's knowledge and tells Bud that Herman is likely his grandfather. Rather than make Bud sad, the news actually makes Bud happy. It reveals that Bud is no longer interested in having Herman be his only source of family.



CHAPTER 19

Herman locks himself in his room while Bud sits at the kitchen table. After Jimmy and Miss Thomas fail to get Herman out, they go back to Bud. They ask Bud if he's sure his mother's name is Angela Janet, and Bud responds that he's sure. Jimmy asks if she ever mentioned the name Calloway, but Bud responds that she didn't.

In realizing that Bud, an orphan, is his grandson, Herman also has to come to terms with the knowledge that his daughter has died. Herman isolates himself from the rest of the band to deal with his grief, suggesting that his daughter meant a lot to him but also raising the question of why he didn't already know about her death or about Bud's existence.



Jimmy asks Bud how his mother passed, and Bud responds that she passed when he was six years old after being too sick to go to work for six days. Bud tells them that when she passed, she didn't suffer, her eyes were open, and it "didn't look like it hurt or nothing." Jimmy asks Bud various questions about what his mother looked like, but Miss Thomas objects to Jimmy's suggestion that Bud is not truly Herman's grandson.

Bud does a bad job of describing his mother, so he asks to be excused to get a picture. He ends up running and then tiptoeing up the stairs—so he doesn't anger Herman since Bud sees his door open—to his room. Inside Bud's room, however, Bud sees Herman perched on a little chair. Herman has his face covered with his hands and doesn't see Bud.

Herman is making noises in his hands, so Bud tries to tiptoe out of the room. At the last minute, he decides he's still going to get the picture, Herman or no Herman. Bud takes out his saxophone case as Herman continues to cry. He gets the picture out and is about to leave when he notices that Herman is actually "bawling his eyes out."

Bud wonders if having him as a grandson is "the worst news anyone could ever give you in your life." He thinks about his "rule 39," "The older you get, the worse something has to be to make you cry."

Bud feels sorry for Herman and walks over to him. He puts his hand on Herman's back, and Herman whips around. He is taken aback when he sees Bud and stumbles to give him an apology. Bud interrupts him, however, to tell him that his name is "Bud, sir, not Buddy." Herman starts crying again so Bud begins to console him for the second time.

Bud leaves and goes back to the kitchen. He drops the picture on middle of the table. Jimmy and Miss Thomas both look at it, but it is Miss Thomas who eventually picks it up, puts on her glasses, and examines the picture of Bud's mother and the horse closer. Jimmy looks at it next and remembers the horse first. Miss Thomas reminds him to look at who else is in the picture. Jimmy looks and is sure the woman is Angela Janet.

Bud relieves some of the horror of his mother's death when he talks openly to Jimmy and Miss Thomas. Like the past times he's told the story, Bud insists that she didn't suffer, which continues to bring him solace.



Bud is surprised to find Herman in his room, though he tries to avoid another conflict, perhaps because he senses the man is in deep pain because of the revelations about his daughter.



After getting the picture of his mother, Bud notices that Herman is in deep pain. The once intimidating man continues to cry and convulse in Bud's presence. This changes Bud's perception of him and Bud realizes that Herman has feelings just like everyone.



Even though Bud is usually extremely mature for his age, in this moment he fails to grasp that Herman is grieving his late daughter. Instead, Bud wonders if Herman is upset because he is Herman's grandson and wonders if being related to him is really that bad.



In this instance, Herman seems like the child while Bud is the wise adult consoling him, which is yet another reminder of how quickly Bud has had to grow up. Herman's apology, coupled with Bud essentially reintroducing himself, suggests that the two are starting fresh in their relationship.



Miss Thomas and Jimmy examine the picture, cautiously at first, and are stunned by the picture's depiction of Bud's mother.



Jimmy asks Bud if he's sure the woman is his mother, and Bud says he's sure. Miss Thomas then brings up what they "got to do" about the situation, and Bud stops listening. Bud tells Miss Thomas that he's just realized that he's not sleeping "some little dead girl's room," but his "momma's room." Miss Thomas tells him he's right.

Bud then asks Miss Thomas why Herman never called to check in on him and Momma, so his mother wouldn't have been so sad. Jimmy and Miss Thomas exchange looks, and then Miss Thomas asks Bud for his hand.

Miss Thomas tells Bud that they didn't know about him, and that "no one knew where [his] mother had gone." Jimmy interjects and says that Herman was hard on her, but Miss Thomas politely asks him to "check on Herman," so Jimmy does.

Miss Thomas then explains that Herman is hard to get along with because he has such high standards, so he "get[s] let down a lot." Bud nods, pretending he understands. She then explains that Herman was especially hard on his daughter, Bud's mother, because he wanted her to be the first in the family to go to school. Miss Thomas tells Bud that Herman's parents were slaves, so he was determined to have his daughter be a schoolteacher.

Miss Thomas finally reveals to Bud that Herman's dream never became his daughter's dream. She also hints that Bud's mother "ran off with one of Herman's drummers."

Miss Thomas reveals they have waited 11 years for a word from her. Then she looks at Bud and tells him that from her perspective, she's "sent [them] the best word [they've] had in years." Bud understands that she means *he's* the "word."

Jimmy again asks Bud if he's absolutely certain the woman in the picture is his mother. It is not that he doesn't want to believe Bud, it is just hard for him to swallow that the girl in the picture is dead. It is a revelatory moment for Bud as well, who realizes that the dead little girl's room was his mother's room. In a way, Bud has never been as close to his mother since she passed. He is physically living among the things she loved at his age.



Bud prepares himself to hear about his mother and grandfather's volatile relationship. Although difficult, Bud does not shy away from the truth, demonstrating his maturity.



Miss Thomas lets Bud know that things were difficult between his mother and grandfather, which made his mother run away. It seems that Bud and his mother share more things in common than he had imagined.



Herman pushed his daughter too hard, which ultimately pushed her away. Though Bud doesn't understand everything Miss Thomas says, he does understand how scary and domineering adults can be, especially when they think they know what's best for a child. Herman's intentions, however, came from a good place as he just wanted his daughter to have a better life.



Miss Thomas suggests that Bud's mother ran away to become her own person. Perhaps that was why she instilled such a strong sense of self within Bud, to give her son something she didn't have growing up.



Miss Thomas reminds Bud of how much his place within their household means to her. Miss Thomas believes Bud's presence is Bud's mother's way of giving them good news after many years of silence.



Miss Thomas excuses herself. Bud thinks she's going to go and cry, but she comes back quickly with a picture of his mother that looked like "Momma'd poked her head out of the cloud." In the moment, he wants to laugh and cry.

Miss Thomas gives Bud a new picture of his mother that makes Bud feel like his mother is looking down from heaven, through the clouds, and giving Bud her blessing to take her place within the Calloway home.



Miss Thomas shows him a trick with the picture. She moves the picture and each time it looks like Bud's mother is still watching him. Bud asks if he can keep it and Miss Thomas says that she's been holding it for the "rightful owner," all along.

Miss Thomas's trick with the photo also makes Bud feel as if his mother still watches over him from the clouds, almost as his guardian angel.



Miss Thomas tells Bud that she needs his help with a problem. She reminds him that the grief of his mother's passing is new to her and Herman, who she reveals thinks about his daughter every day.

Miss Thomas also asks Bud for help dealing with the news of his mother's passing since the pain is still raw to her and Herman. While Bud feels as if he has gained a new family, to them it feels as if they have both gained and lost a new family member, which is a lot to process.



Miss Thomas tells Bud that Herman looks for Bud's mother in every show. She also tells Bud that the stones he picks are for Bud's mother because when she was four, she had asked Herman, who was on his way to a show, for a rock from Chicago.

The shadow of Bud's mother's absence continues to live on within their household and the band's shows. Even in her absence, Bud's mother is a huge part of Herman's life, just like she is a huge part of Bud's life.



Miss Thomas finally reveals that they need him to remember that she and Herman love his mother as much as he does. Bud doesn't believe them; he especially doesn't believe Herman could love anyone. Miss Thomas tells Bud to be patient with Herman, just as Jimmy comes back down and tells her that Herman wants her. Bud excuses her and takes back the picture of his mother.

Miss Thomas wants Bud to know that his mother is as much a part of their family as she was a part of Bud's family. Miss Thomas is asking Bud to be patient and mature for her and Herman as they grieve for his mother.



Shortly after, the rest of the band comes inside, talking loudly. They ask Bud where everyone is. Bud avoids telling them everyone is crying. Instead he says they are "around."

Bud does not reveal to the band that everyone is grieving for his mother, which is perhaps his attempt to be patient and mature like Miss Thomas asked.



Steady Eddie tells Bud that because he's been working so hard on the recorder, they've put their "pennies" together to get Bud a present. Bud opens the case and sees a "baby-size horn like Steady Eddie's saxophone." Bud looks at his "bandmates" and thanks them repeatedly.

Steady Eddie provides Bud with a new instrument, which makes all the previous sorrow and hurt disappear briefly from Bud's mind. It gives Bud a chance to focus on how good it feels to belong to a family now, and it is also another indication that Eddie, who also plays the saxophone, intends to take Bud under his wing.



Steady Eddie helps him take it out and puts the horn together to play it. He tells Bud he refurbished it for him. Then he takes out a can that says “Brasso,” and tells Bud to use a rag to “shine her up.”

Bud promises he’ll be just as good as them in three weeks, making the band laugh. Steady Eddie promises to start giving him lessons. He also promises to bring back sheet music after he’s back from Tyla’s place.

Bud then tries on the saxophone for the first time and is happy with its weight. Bud asks to be excused but the band members egg him on to play, so Bud tells them they’ll have to wait to hear him perform with them in three weeks. Bud asks to be excused and Steady Eddie excuses him. Bud thanks his bandmates again profusely on his way out.

Bud goes upstairs and notices that Miss Thomas’s door is closed, but he can hear both her and Herman talking. He doesn’t want to listen, so he takes his saxophone to his room.

Bud takes out the case with his things and makes his bed with his blanket. He takes the rock that says Flint and puts it on his table. He takes the **flyers**, knocks on Herman’s door even though he knows he’s not in, and then leaves the flyers and the rest of the rocks in his room. Bud is sure they mean more to Herman than they do to him.

Next, Bud goes back to his room, takes out a thumbtack and the picture of his mother on a horse, and sticks the picture on the wall of horses, where it “looked like it belonged.” Bud realizes he doesn’t need any of these things anymore because Deza was right—he carries his mother inside him. Besides, “the one rock from Flint would be enough,” so he puts it on his sax case.

Steady Eddie reminds Bud to treat the instrument as if it is very valuable—just like a true musician. Again, Bud feels excited to take part in making music with his band family.



Bud, eager to prove himself yet again, decides he will impress them by learning the music as quickly as possible. This does impress Eddie, so he agrees to give Bud lessons soon.



Bud’s commitment to getting good at playing the saxophone in only three short weeks reveals his deep desire to make his band family proud of him.



Bud uncharacteristically avoids the opportunity to eavesdrop on Miss Thomas’ and Herman’s conversation. This shows that Bud is no longer as wary around adults. He has put his trust in his family, and he believes they mean the best for him. This signals that his volatile relationship with adults may finally be coming to an end.



Bud begins to “move in” to his mother’s room, further solidifying his place in the family and in the home. Since he has decided that this will be his permanent home, he no longer has to plan or prepare to run at a moment’s notice with all of his things. For that reason, he looks for permanent places for his belongings within the house. He even finds it in his heart to leave his flyers and rocks in Herman’s room, perhaps because it will show Herman that his daughter thought about him often as well.



Bud hangs the picture of his mother next to him on the wall so that she continues to be near him. Both of them, Bud and his mother, are right where they belong in the end: he is with the band, and she is with the horses she loved from childhood and the son she loved in adulthood. Moreover, Bud finally understands that he doesn’t need to carry his mother with him in a suitcase because she already exists within him—which no one can steal from him.



Bud then prepares to play the saxophone, so he can know if he can play with the band soon. He counts to 10 and plays but the sax makes a screeching sound, so Bud counts to 10 again. The second time he plays, he's more impressed by what he hears, and he's confident he can "learn how to play this." Bud imagines the sounds are of "one door closing and another opening."

Finally, Bud looks at the picture of Momma that Miss Thomas gave him and smiles at it. He tells his mother he "can't wait" for what comes next. Then he closes his eyes and begins to practice again.

Bud, excited by all the rich possibilities of his new life, gets to work preparing for the day he will take the stage and make his family proud. For once, Bud's future doesn't feel bleak but laden with the promise of love, family, and adventure. He imagines this is what his mother must have meant about new doors in one's life opening.



Having finally found a place where he belongs and is loved, Bud is excited for the future and "can't wait" to see all of the doors that continue to open for him.





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