

# Outlook on Halton Hills

## A deeply-rooted love classic

### LOOKING INTO THE LIBRARY



By JANE McQUARRIE  
Halton Hills Public Libraries  
The Foundling by Hector Malot, translated by Douglas Munro. New York: Harmony Books, 1984.

Hector Malot's (1830-1907) children's story Sans Famille, is still one of the most deeply-rooted and loved of French children's classics, being printed again and again down the years. Written in 1878, it has been translated variously as Nobody's Boy, Without Relations, The Adventures of Remi, and most recently as The Foundling (1984).

A foundling named Remi is brought up by a kindly woman, but poverty strikes the household and he is sold to Signor Vitalis, the manager of a troupe of performing animals. He encounters a wealthy English family who are travelling on a canal barge, and eventually discovers that he is their long-lost son.

This is a picaresque novel in the best sense. In the course of the book Remi has many harrowing and exciting experiences, but his lot, unlike

that of his fictional contemporary Oliver Twist, is not one of unmitigated misery. Remi is a sturdy and likeable boy, well-loved by his peasant foster mother. When he is sold by his foster father, his master proves to be a wise, gentle and noble man, whom Remi comes to love and respect. In the course of their travels, Remi shares hunger, poverty and freezing cold, but he learns from his friends, along with reading, writing, music and acting, the great lesson of loyal friendship.

Naturally enough, much of the material in The Foundling was derived from the author's own life. Hector Malot was born in a small town in Normandy, and was well acquainted with the peasants and the countryside he depicts. Remi's quest reads like a nineteenth century travelogue of France, as he names and describes the many villages and towns he passes through. From Auvergne, the "company" of comedians travel through the south of France, working their way to Paris and eventually to England and

Switzerland. Indeed it has been suggested that Malot intentionally included these geographical details in order to familiarize French children with their native land.

Because The Foundling is an abridgement, a lot of incidents are packed into a space that is shorter than the author had originally intended. I found the pace too hurried for my liking, preferring the more languorous ramble of its earlier, and much longer translation, Nobody's

Boy. The pen sketches in this new edition give the text an old-fashioned feeling, but occasionally they add a disturbing element to a sometimes frightening story.

Still and all, this is one of my very favorite old stories, and I'm delighted that someone else has cared enough about it to bring it alive for a new generation. Both The Foundling and Nobody's Boy are available at the Georgetown Public Library.

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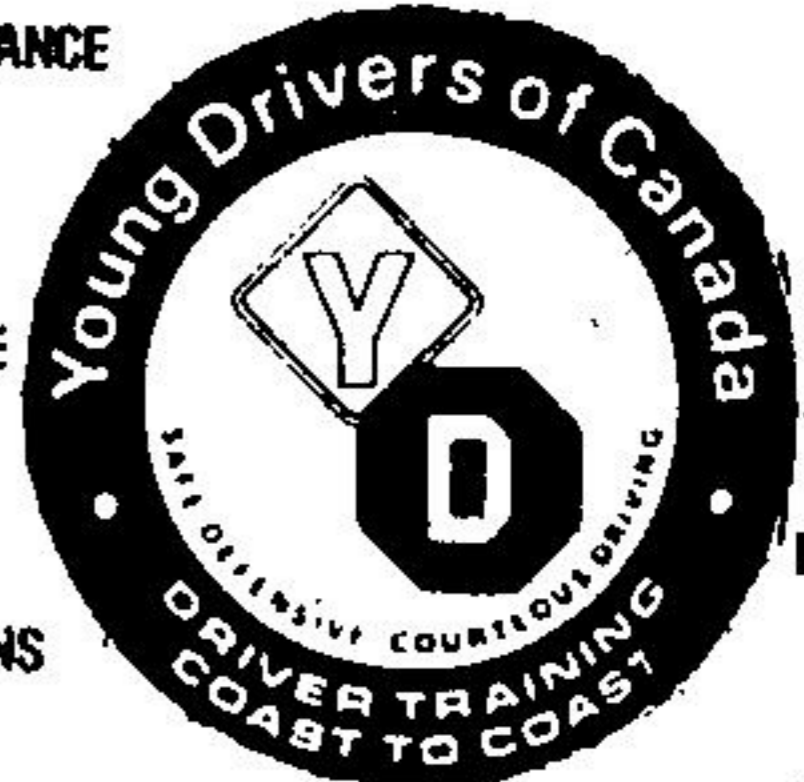
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### Shettle launch

The town has found a replacement for retiring Building Inspector Doug Sargent.

Ron Shettle will take over his position as the Chief Building Official and Zoning Administrator March 14.

Council hired Mr. Shettle Monday.

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