

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Copyright Protection. This play (the “Play”) is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, and the Berne Convention.

Reservation of Rights. All rights to this Play are strictly reserved, including, without limitation, professional and amateur stage performance rights; motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video, and sound recording rights; rights to all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction now known or yet to be invented, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, photocopying, and information storage and retrieval systems; and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

Performance Licensing and Royalty Payments. Amateur and stock performance rights to this Play are controlled exclusively by Playscripts, Inc. (“Playscripts”). No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this Play without obtaining advance written permission from Playscripts. Required royalty fees for performing this Play are specified online at the Playscripts website (www.playscripts.com). Such royalty fees may be subject to change without notice. Although this book may have been obtained for a particular licensed performance, such performance rights, if any, are not transferable. Required royalties must be paid every time the Play is performed before any audience, whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. All licensing requests and inquiries concerning amateur and stock performance rights should be addressed to Playscripts (see contact information on opposite page).

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to Playscripts, as well; such inquiries will be communicated to the author and the author's agent, as applicable.

Restriction of Alterations. There shall be no deletions, alterations, or changes of any kind made to the Play, including the changing of character gender, the cutting of dialogue, or the alteration of objectionable language, unless directly authorized by Playscripts. The title of the Play shall not be altered.

Author Credit. Any individual or group receiving permission to produce this Play is required to give credit to the author as the sole and exclusive author of the Play. This obligation applies to the title page of every program distributed in connection with performances of the Play, and in any instance that the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing, or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and of a font size at least 50% as large as the largest letter used in the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the author. The name of the author may not be abbreviated or otherwise altered from the form in which it appears in this Play.

Publisher Attribution. All programs, advertisements, and other printed material distributed or published in connection with the amateur or stock production of the Play shall include the following notice:

**Produced by special arrangement with Playscripts, Inc.
(www.playscripts.com)**

Prohibition of Unauthorized Copying. Any unauthorized copying of this book or excerpts from this book is strictly forbidden by law. Except as otherwise permitted by applicable law, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including, without limitation, photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Playscripts.

Statement of Non-affiliation. This Play may include references to brand names and trademarks owned by third parties, and may include references to public figures. Playscripts is not necessarily affiliated with these public figures, or with the owners of such trademarks and brand names. Such references are included solely for parody, political comment, or other permitted purposes.

Permissions for Sound Recordings and Musical Works. This Play may contain directions calling for the performance of a portion, or all, of a musical work, or performance of a sound recording of a musical work. Playscripts has not obtained permissions to perform such works. The producer of this Play is advised to obtain such permissions, if required in the context of the production. The producer is directed to the websites of the U.S. Copyright Office (www.copyright.gov), ASCAP (www.ascap.com), BMI (www.bmi.com), and NMPA (www.nmpa.org) for further information on the need to obtain permissions, and on procedures for obtaining such permissions.

The Rules in Brief

- 1) Do NOT perform this Play without obtaining prior permission from Playscripts, and without paying the required royalty.
- 2) Do NOT photocopy, scan, or otherwise duplicate any part of this book.
- 3) Do NOT alter the text of the Play, change a character's gender, delete any dialogue, or alter any objectionable language, unless explicitly authorized by Playscripts.
- 4) DO provide the required credit to the author and the required attribution to Playscripts in all programs and promotional literature associated with any performance of this Play.

For more details on these and other rules, see the opposite page.

Copyright Basics

This Play is protected by United States and international copyright law. These laws ensure that playwrights are rewarded for creating new and vital dramatic work, and protect them against theft and abuse of their work.

A play is a piece of property, fully owned by the playwright, just like a house or car. You must obtain permission to use this property, and must pay a royalty fee for the privilege—*whether or not you charge an admission fee*. Playscripts collects these required payments on behalf of the author.

Anyone who violates an author's copyright is liable as a copyright infringer under United States and international law. Playscripts and the author are entitled to institute legal action for any such infringement, which can subject the infringer to actual damages, statutory damages, and attorneys' fees. A court may impose statutory damages of up to \$150,000 for willful copyright infringements. U.S. copyright law also provides for possible criminal sanctions. Visit the website of the U.S. Copyright Office (www.copyright.gov) for more information.

THE BOTTOM LINE: If you break copyright law, you are robbing a playwright and opening yourself to expensive legal action. Follow the rules, and when in doubt, ask us.

Playscripts, Inc.
325 W. 38th Street, Suite 305
New York, NY 10018

Phone: 1-866-NEW-PLAY (639-7529)
Email: info@playscripts.com
Web: www.playscripts.com

For Curtis and Alex, my muses.

Cast of Characters

The Orphans:

VLADIMIR
MARIA
PATRICK
MICHAEL
CHRIS
MARLENA
YAKOB
JUSTINA
EMMA
NEWSBOY

The Adults:

NARRATOR
REVEREND BRACE
MISS TIPPETT
MR. SINGER
MRS. SINGER
MRS. ALBRIGHT
MR. CLIFFORD
MILO BURKE
MISS BILLINGS
MR. LATHIE
MRS. LATHIE
MISS SCOTT
MR. DOBBS
MRS. DOBBS
SEBASTIAN
MRS. WRIGHTMAN
MISS ASHCROFT
MRS. STOKES
MAYOR CREAGAN
MISS LYONS
HAZEL
FARMERS AND THEIR WIVES
TOWNFOLK

Setting

New York City, and points west. 1853 to early 1900s.

Production Notes

Properties:

17 satchels of varying sizes

Mandolin

Baby doll

Towel

Clipboards

Flyers announcing Rev. Brace

Acknowledgments

The original production of *Orphan Trains* was presented at Pearl River Central High School, Carriere, Mississippi, on November 18, 2004. The ensemble (in alphabetical order) and production staff were as follows:

NARRATORBrett Barnes
MR. SINGER, MR. LATHIE,
MAYOR CREAGAN..... Bobby Bodenhamer
CHRIS SCHULTZ Brooke Brayson
MISS TIPPETT, MISS SCOTT Sara Cohen
MILO BURKE, SEBASTIAN Alex Craig
MRS. SINGER, MISS LYONSCaroline Currie
MRS. LATHIE, MISS ASHCROFT..... Sadie Davis
MARLENA..... Angelique Guidry
MRS. ALBRIGHT, MATTIE,
SINGER OF HYMNShana Harrison
MISS BILLINGS, MRS. DOBBSBrittany Hudson
REVEREND BRACE, MR. CLIFFORD,
MR. DOBBS..... Cade Jarrell
VLADIMIR, MICHAEL, YAKOB... Caleb Kirkland
NEWSBOY, PATRICK..... Patrick Mitchell
MRS. STOKES, HAZELAmy Schmidt
MARIA.....Sarah Smith
EMMA Sunni Smith

JUSTINA..... Rachael Walker
Director and Author Deborah M. Craig
Assistant Director and
Choreographer..... Sonnet Holloway
Vocal CoachJana Reesor
Lights Thomas Doyle
Sound Dustin Martinez
SpotlightMeagan Douglass
CostumesNancy Bryant, Dorothy Sconza
Stage ManagerMystik Boone
Stage Crew Kyle Henry, Erenst Loustalet,
John Davis, Heather Wolf,
Sean Fried, Alicia Mendel
Box Office Chaz Burriws, John Criswell
Props, Make-up Nikki Henry, Britton Sims

ORPHAN TRAINS

by Deborah M. Craig

BASED ON ARCHIVES, TRANSCRIPTS AND RECORDS OF
THE ORPHAN TRAIN PROJECT,
CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

(Music, folk music from the 1890s, begins. The stage is set with four benches behind panels to resemble a train, placed across the upstage area of the stage. In front of this, at center stage, are three crates, arranged in an informal fashion, used later on which the CAST members will stand and sit. An optional effect would be blown up photographs of the Orphan Train Project, suspended behind the train seats. Lights come up, and the music slowly fades as we hear a ship's horn. Then from both sides of the stage will enter the cast with luggage and bags from 1918. They stand, with their backs to the audience, in clusters of four. Then, one cluster at a time, they turn around, speaking in a foreign language: first German, then Spanish, then French, then English in a thick Irish dialect. [Other languages may also be used. Phrases such as "We're finally here!" and "Where do we go now?" and "Does everyone have their visas?", should be researched and practiced in a foreign language of the director's choice.] As each family group talks to each other, ACTORS come to the edge of the stage as if they're at a checkpoint. Sound effects of harbor sounds and crowd noises continue and begin to slowly fade out. Then, one cluster at a time, someone from each cluster says "America" in different ways. At the last "America," they stop, then all seventeen cast members come forward in a new formation and begin speaking to the audience.)

(This choral dialogue to the audience is upbeat, varied, nearly overlapping, and heartfelt.)

ACTOR 1. A thousand people a day...

ACTOR 2. One thousand new people...

ACTOR 3. Families, single men, single women, children...

ACTOR 4. one thousand of them a day!

ACTOR 5. Pour into our new country...

ACTOR 6. For 50 years running, 1,000 people a day

ACTOR 7. Poured into New York Harbor...

ACTOR 8. For a new life.

ACTOR 9. A better life...

ACTOR 10. Another chance...

ACTOR 11. To re-invent themselves.

ACTOR 12. And from all over they come...

ACTOR 13. Ireland...

ACTOR 14. Germany...

ACTOR 15. Greece...

ACTOR 16. Russia...

ACTOR 17. Italy...

ACTOR 1. Scotland...

ACTOR 2. Hungary...

ACTOR 3. Egypt...

ACTOR 4. Turkey...

ACTOR 5. Denmark...

ACTOR 6. Romania...

ACTOR 7. China...

ACTOR 8. Morocco...

EVERYONE. From all over the world they come...

ACTOR 9. One thousand people a day for fifty years....

(Music begins, and cast members turn and put their luggage on the train benches; they now turn to one another in conversational groups as upper-class New Yorkers.)

NEWSBOY. *(Walking , as though passing out fliers, from SR to SL.)* The Reverend Brace to speak at Trinity Church tonight! Community Meeting at 7 PM!

(The REV. CHARLES LORING BRACE comes forward and stands on one of the crates. The crowd slowly forms around him.)

REV. BRACE. We have a dangerous situation in our city! *(CROWD reacts as if in agreement.)* Children everywhere! Orphans! Neglected! Abused! According to police, over 10,000 of them! In our streets! Living like beggars, like animals! Good Christian people can no longer afford to look the other way! *(Some applause.)*

NEW YORKER, ACTOR 10. It's all the foreigners! They're ruining our country! Can't even take care of their own!

NEW YORKER, ACTOR 11. It's not their fault sometimes...A lot of them died in the fever epidemic.

NEW YORKER, ACTOR 12. Those slums they live in...conditions beyond belief!

REV. BRACE. Whatever the reason for their parents being gone, alive or dead, they're in our streets, and we must do something!

NEW YORKER, ACTOR 13. Reverend, we HAVE got the orphan asylums, ya know!

NEW YORKER, ACTOR 14. I do charity work, there...they're doing a good job with those orphans!

REV. BRACE. But they're turning children away...all of them, even the convent orphanages! They're overflowing, and cannot care for a fraction of the children who are in our streets!

NEW YORKER, ACTOR 15. So we build more orphanages!

(CROWD murmurs in agreement.)

REV. BRACE. There's a better way for these children than the orphanages; to give them fresh air, the country, a clean, simple life with loving families...on farms...in the West, and in the South...

NEW YORKER, ACTOR 15. You're saying farm families want 'em? Why?

NEW YORKER, ACTOR 16. How do you know?

REV. BRACE. I've posted notices in newspapers all over the west . There are thousands of good Christian farmers and ranchers, whose families will take in orphans and give them homes and a good life!

(CROWD applauds. REV. BRACE gets off cube and puts it on train bench. CAST turns towards audience in formation. Underscored by music. As the CAST make a transition, NARRATOR walks across stage.)

NARRATOR. And so the Orphan Train Project was born. The Reverend Brace raised thousands in donations for train fare for the orphans. Trainloads of children, mostly immigrant children, orphaned or neglected, ages six months to 15, leave New York every week for the west, to 47 states and territories... for seventy five years! *(Train whistle is sounded.)* April 1912. Orphan train leaves New York for Port Joseph, Missouri!

(Exits SL. CAST makes a transition: Orphan agent MRS. TIPPET and CHILDREN remain onstage, remainder of cast offstage.)

(CHILDREN, lined up, slowly board train.)

MRS. TIPPET. All right, children, board the train, quickly now, three to a seat. Make sure you have your bags.

(VLADIMIR tries to rush by with his mandolin.)

Vladimir, I told you, no extra things! Just your clothes!

VLADIMIR. Please, Ms. Tippett! It was my father's!

MRS. TIPPET. Where you're going, you won't be needin' it. You'll have a new life *(Takes the mandolin.)*

(MRS. TIPPET boards the train as MARIA, holding baby, comes DSC, from the line, speaks to the audience, stage goes dark and CHILDREN on train freeze; spotlight on MARIA.)

MARIA. I am the oldest of five... Mama and Papa were good to all of us...but Papa went to work at the docks one morning and never came back...Mama looked for him and asked around...some say he was killed...we'll never know...we still were all right, though...we took in laundry and my brothers sold papers...but then Mama died

of fever after Gina was born...then they came for us...I don't know where my three brothers are now. They promised they'd keep us together...they *promised*...and I promised Mama I'd never leave Gina.

(Train whistle blows.)

MRS. ALBRIGHT. *(As ADULTS representing farmers and their wives enter from SL and SR:)* All right children, come off, quickly now, without a word...single file in front of the train, now, hurry, that's it...

(CHILDREN leave benches and stand DS in a line with their bags as the FARMERS, coming from SL and SR, walk up to various CHILDREN and begin talking to them.)

Good evening, ladies, sirs...I am agent Estelle Albright from the Children's Aid Society; I have papers on each child's age and background.

MRS. SINGER. *(Coming DSR with her husband:)* Look George, a little baby...I want the baby, George!

(She goes up to MARIA as GEORGE approaches MRS. ALBRIGHT.)

GEORGE SINGER. *(To MRS. ALBRIGHT, as the other farmers continue talking to the children:)* Ma'am, my wife?...she gave birth to a stillborn... 'bout a year ago...been wanting to adopt a baby off these trains ever since...this's the first baby we seen off the trains since a year...we'll take her, Ma'am; raise her like our own...

(They pause and mime further conversation as the scene shifts to MARIA and MRS. SINGER.)

MARIA. Her name's Gina...we're sisters...

(MRS. SINGER takes the baby in her arms.)

MRS. SINGER. And where is your mother?

MARIA. She died in childbirth...we've been at the orphanage for five months...

MRS. SINGER. She's so beautiful...George! Look at her George! We'll sign the papers now, and go home with her! George?

MARIA. *(Tries to get the baby back from her.)* But I promised my Mama! We'd stay together! Take me too, Ma'am! Oh, I'll be good! I can cook, and I can wash clothes!

MRS. SINGER. *(Struggling to get the baby free from her:)* George!

(MRS. ALBRIGHT and MR. SINGER come over to MARIA and MRS. SINGER.)

MRS. ALBRIGHT. Just a moment, sir, Madame. I'll take care of this. It's not a problem. Happens all the time when the siblings get separated.

(Goes to MARIA who is sobbing and clutching the baby.)

Now listen, Maria, I know this is hard, but these folks want Gina, and you'll have to let her go.

MARIA. I promised Mama, we'd stay together...

MRS. ALBRIGHT. Maria, when we found you, all five of you, you were living in a storeroom of a sewing factory, full of filth and no food...the baby would be dead if it weren't for us...

MARIA. Why don't they want me, too?

MRS. ALBRIGHT. Because their baby died, and they want Gina...now if you love Gina, you'll do what's best for her...Give her to these good people for them to raise her. *(Takes the baby from her gently as MARIA sobs...)* Here you are, Mr. and Mrs. Singer...

(They excitedly take the baby and exit. MRS. ALBRIGHT goes to the line of children as MARIA faces the audience; spotlight on MARIA.)

MARIA. That was the last time I saw my sister. The train went South to Arkansas and I was adopted by an elderly couple, who owned a small farm. They were kind, had no children of their own, and so they adopted me and gave me a wonderful life...but I'd have given it all up in a minute just to see my mother's face again, my sister's and brothers'... for just one day...I was given a good life, but I never forgot that there was another *me*...a part of my past that was taken from me...

(Music, lights up, spotlight out, train whistle blows as MARIA gets on train bench and sits. PATRICK, MICHAEL, MILO BURKE, and MR. CLIFFORD come DSC, where MR. CLIFFORD sets up a desk by putting two crates on top of one another.)

NARRATOR. *(Entering from SL:)* August, 1914, New York Orphan Asylum. A train is scheduled to leave the next day for three cities in Illinois. The train will be full, to make more room at the orphanage... *(Exits SR.)*

MILO BURKE. *(Standing in front of Mr. Clifford's desk.)* Why can't they stay at the orphanage, Mr. Clifford? ...just till I get back on me feet again?...Their mother's dead. *(Coughs and wheezes:)* I've been sick...couldn't work...but I'm almost better now.

MR. CLIFFORD. *(Ignoring him and reading off document on a clipboard:)* This is to certify that I am the father and only legal guardian of Patrick and Michael Burke. I hereby freely and of my own will agree for the Children's Aid Society to provide them homes until they are of age. I hereby promise not to interfere in any arrangements that they may make. "Milo P. Burke." You need to sign here, Mr. Burke.

MILO BURKE. But, I'm tryin' to tell ya, Mr. Clifford, I just need ya to keep 'em a few more weeks...please don't put 'em on the trains! *(Coughs and hacks.)*

MR. CLIFFORD. Mr. Burke, *(Looks over to PATRICK and MICHAEL, then says softly:)* look at you....you've got consumption, sir....you won't last past Christmas...now do what's best for your boys. I'll make sure they get good homes. Besides, when you left them here, they became wards of the city. It's best, Mr. Burke. Please sign....

(MR. BURKE reluctantly signs paper in background as PATRICK steps forward and speaks. Spotlight on PATRICK.)

PATRICK. And so Pa signed the papers. We told him not to worry; that even if they did put us on the trains, we'd find a way back to him...

(Spotlight out, lights up; train whistle blows. CAST members get up and go around the front of the benches as if to board them. PATRICK, MICHAEL and their father are DSC.)

MILO BURKE. Here *(Takes an envelope out of his pocket.)* Don't lose this, Patrick. Now write to me, when you're settled. As long as you have this address, you'll always be able to find me. *(MR. CLIFFORD yells from the benches.)*

MR. CLIFFORD. Patrick Burke! Get on this train now!

MILO BURKE. *(Whispers:)* Hold on to that, now...keep it in a safe place. *(They embrace.)* God be with ya, Patrick. *(Patrick boards train and father exits, SL.)*

(Whistle blows, train sounds of a steam engine coming to a halt; MR. CLIFFORD gets off train.)

MR. CLIFFORD. All right, children, we are in Three Rivers, Illinois, and these fine families have come to give you good new homes! File out now! Stand in a single line along the train!

(As the ADULTS file on stage from SL and SR,. CHILDREN file off train. PATRICK stops, feels pockets, turns.)

PATRICK. Wait! Michael! I have to get something! *(Goes back up to bench and begins to look around, frantically. MR. CLIFFORD comes up and hauls him off train.)*

MR. CLIFFORD. Get back in line with the others. Now!

PATRICK. But I lost an envelope! I need to find it!

MR. CLIFFORD. You don't need any envelope for where you are now. This place will be your life now. Get in line!

(He pushes him, and he gets in line as the FARMERS AND THEIR WIVES mill over the CHILDREN. PATRICK steps forward as CAST freezes and lights slowly fade as spotlight goes on PATRICK.)

PATRICK. Never did find that envelope with my pa's address. Michael was adopted in Three Rivers, and I never saw him again. Then I got placed with a family in Nebraska; never adopted me, just wanted cheap labor, that's about it. Wasn't bad, though. Learned to

ride a horse. Herd cows. Grow crops. Never saw my pa again. I wanted to go back to New York as soon as I turned 16 to try to find him? But my buddies talked me out of it...told me he'd probably be dead, so I never went...but at night, I see Pa's and Michael's faces, and hear Pa talkin' to me, in his brogue...

(Music begins softly as lights come up and spotlight go out, as PATRICK goes to the train bench. Train whistle is heard again, then the steam engine chugging, then coming to halt, as the NARRATOR says:)

NARRATOR. May, 1915, an orphan train leaves New York for points west; final stop, Kansas... *(Exits.)*

MISS BILLINGS. *(Walks to end of benches then standing USR.)* All right, children, we're in Germantown, Kansas, and the good families here have come to open their homes and hearts to you for wonderful new lives on their farms. Quickly now, single file! Stand on the platform!

(CHILDREN file out and stand as FARMERS AND THEIR WIVES come from SL and SR.)

FARMER LATHIE. *(To CHRIS, as they, with MRS. LATHIE, wind their way DSC towards the crates:)* What's your name, son?

CHRIS. It ain't son, and I ain't *your* son!

FARMER LATHIE. *(Unfazed by his insult. By this time, CHRIS is seated on a crate, while MRS. LATHIE is on one side of him and Farmer Lathie is kneeling on one knee on the other side of him.)* How old are ya?

CHRIS. Not old enough to be left alone an' where I was!

FARMER LATHIE. Clara, this one's a character. Have you ever ridden a horse?

(CHRIS shakes his head no.)

FARMER LATHIE. Are ya hungry? *(CHRIS shrugs and looks down.)*

MISS BILLINGS. *(Crosses and stands behind the three of them with her clipboard.)* This one's fourteen. Says his name is Chris. Chris Schultz.

FARMER LATHIE. Well, I'm mighty pleased to make your acquaintance, Chris Schultz. *(Holds out his hand to CHRIS, which*

CHRIS *does not shake.*) How would you like to come back to the farm with Miz Lathie and me?

MISS BILLINGS. He'll accept, Mr. Lathie. Won't you, Chris?

CHRIS. I guess so...got nothin' to lose...am I gonna go to school and all, or are you gonna work me like a dog?

FARMER LATHIE. *(Laughs.)* Chris, you'll go to school and do chores and have fun just like my other two children.

CHRIS. You got two kids, why do you want me for?

CLARA LATHIE. To give you a home, Chris. We'd like to be your parents, if you like us. But right now let's get home to some stew and biscuits! *(Lights down...spotlight on CHRIS as he steps forward.)*

CHRIS. And that was it. Like I had made this journey from my old life and gone to Heaven or something. I'd been in the streets my whole life, selling papers, living in a shed behind a tenement with the other paper boys. We was a gang. And that was my life for as long as I could remember. No mother, no father...

(Lights up, spotlight out. FARMERS AND THEIR WIVES and the other ORPHANS file out, SL and SR. CLARA LATHIE comes from behind the panels with a towel.)

CLARA LATHIE. Why don't you wash up at the pump out back before we eat? There's soap out there. And a wooden tub. It's already filled with hot water. Here. *(CHRIS leaves the spotlight and exits, SL, and then CLARA, following him. A scream is heard offstage. CLARA runs back to DSC.)* Arthur!

FARMER LATHIE. *(Enters from SR:)* What is it?

CLARA LATHIE. Our Chris is not a Christopher, but a *Christine!*

FARMER LATHIE. What?

CLARA LATHIE. She's a *girl!*

FARMER LATHIE. No!

CLARA LATHIE. Go see for yourself! No! Wait! Don't see for yourself!

CHRIS. (*Enters from SL, cap off, to reveal long hair.*) I'm sorry...I should've told you at the train station...but I was afraid...

FARMER LATHIE. Of what?

CHRIS. That you wouldn't want me if you knew I was a girl.

FARMER LATHIE. How long have you been dressing like a boy?

CHRIS. Since I was 5 or 6. See, in the city, only boys sell the newspapers. They won't let girls. So I dressed up as a boy to get me a job at a newsstand; I ended up one of the best news hawkers in New York! (*Hesitates, then decides to demonstrate for them.*) "Hey—yyyy-eeehhhh! Get yeh paper herrrrrreeeyaahhhh!"

CLARA LATHIE. (*Looks at ARTHUR and they both laugh. Crosses to CHRIS.*) Well, Chris, you can be a *girl* here, with us. You'll go to school and live with us as one of the family.

FARMER LATHIE. And tomorrow we go to town and get you some dresses!

(They laugh as lights fade out, THE LATHIES turn and freeze, as spotlight on CHRIS as she crosses DSC to speak:)

CHRIS. And that was the first day of my new life. My life as Christine Lathie, daughter of Arthur and Clara Lathie, of Germantown, Kansas! Even though I had never been to school and was behind, I could read. I did well at Germantown High School and later on graduated fifth in the class of 1923! And to be loved by parents, Arthur and Clara, and my brother and sister, Lester and Maggie, well, was better than I had ever hoped for myself how things could be.

(Spotlight out lights up, CHRIS crosses US to sit on the bench behind the panels. Train sound effects again.)

NARRATOR. (*Enters from SL:*) And the orphan trains keep rolling...one every week...out of New York, Boston, Philadelphia...July, 1918...Indiana! Orphan train arrives in Flintridge, Indiana! (*Exits SR.*)

(Final train whistle is heard as orphan agent MISS SCOTT hurries CHILDREN off a train to stand in line. Then the TOWNSFOLK enter from SL and SR.)

MISS SCOTT. *(With clipboard:)* Good evening, everyone. The Children's Aid Society of New York thanks you for this opportunity! I am Miss Velma Scott, the agent in charge of these children, and I have names, ages and backgrounds of each child!

(The ADULTS in the crowd nod and murmur thank you's.)

SEBASTIAN. *(Enters from SR during her speech, obviously drunk, but disquieting with his tirade.)* What a sham! Get these foreigners' children out of our town!

FARMER DOBBS. *(To MISS SCOTT:)* Don't pay him any mind...town drunk!

SEBASTIAN. And ain't we high and mighty, now? Hypocrites! The whole lousy parcel of yahs! Adoption into loving homes, in a pig's eye! You all want cheap labor for yer farms, and she knows it, and she's lettin' ya do it! *(CROWD OF ADULTS, shocked and murmuring to themselves.)*

MISS SCOTT. Now, that's enough, sir! You don't know what you're saying. Hold your tongue in front of these children! You're scarin' 'em!

SEBASTIAN. Shouldn't they ought to be hearin' the truth? At least you owe *that* to them!

FARMER DOBBS. *(Pushing SEBASTIAN further to SR:)* Sebastian, you git on outta here...now! Before I tie you to my wagon and haul your sorry carcass to the jail...your second home!

(CROWD laughs.)

SEBASTIAN. I'll go, 'cause I have no mind to stay to see these children handed over like cattle to you shameful hypocrites! *(He exits, SL.)*

MR. DOBBS. *(Crossing to SL by MISS SCOTT:)* Sorry 'bout him, Ma'am. The name's Dobbs, my wife and I —we got three hundred acres right outside o' town. Plenty of room and fresh air for these orphans...

MRS. DOBBS. *(Crosses to the other side of Miss Scott, a bit guilty by what Sebastian said:)* And all's we got were three daughters, and they all married and gone off. Yes, we do need help with chores, but

we're fixin' to raise a boy and love him like our own ...and send him to school and such...and adopt him.

MISS SCOTT. And anyone of these boys would be suitable and delighted with a loving home as such you'd give them, Ma'am!

(The BOYS in line all react differently, some trying to impress, others a little nervous and bewildered.)

(MARLENA steps forward, as everyone else freezes, and the lights go down as the spotlight on her.)

MARLENA. And that's how the evening went in Flintridge, Indiana. It was our sixth stop. The Dobbs took two boys with them, then there were eight of us left; After that, the rest of the girls were placed with families that night. Except me. Was too old, the agent told me. Fifteen, and they think you're too old...could run away, or steal from them, or cause trouble...I'd been at the orphan asylum, since I was two. Never knew my parents, no brother or sister. The matron said I had a tag that was written in German on my blanket. But all it said was that my name was Marlena. And that's all I know about where I'm from and who I am. Wish they had just left me at the orphan asylum; taking care o' the little ones...

(THE FARMERS AND THEIR NEW FAMILY MEMBERS exit SL. Spotlight out, lights up. All other cast members exit SL and SR, except MISS SCOTT. MARLENA slumps on one of the crates. MISS SCOTT approaches her.)

MISS SCOTT. I'm sorry, Marlena... we got two or three stops on the way back to New York. *(Puts arm around her.)* Come on. We'll eat some pie together on the train.

MATTIE WRIGHTMAN. *(Enters from SR, out of breath, with shawl and purse. She is in her sixties.)* Wait! My neighbors said there was one girl left. An older child!

MISS SCOTT. Yes...Can I help you?

MATTIE. Yes, the name's, Mrs. Mattie Wrightman, and I'd like to take the girl home with me, if I may.

MISS SCOTT. Not meaning to be rude, Ma'am, but the Aid Society's set an age limit on adoptive or foster parents...

MATTIE. I'm a widow, to be sure, and in my sixties, but I'm well off and can give a good home to the girl.

MISS SCOTT. I'm sorry, Ma'am, but...

MARLENA. *(Interrupts her, and rushing between her and MISS MATTIE.)* Wait...Miss Scott?. It's all right. I'll talk to the lady, if I may?

MISS SCOTT. Well, I suppose it would be all right. I'll be by the train if you need me. *(Crosses to USL.)*

MARLENA. *(Turning to MATTIE and curtsyng:)* I'm Marlena Breck, Ma'am.

MATTIE. I'm Mattie Wrightman, my dear, and I'm pleased to know you. How old are you, dear? *(Crosses to sit on one of the crates and motions MARLENA to sit next to her.)*

MARLENA. *(Sits next to her.)* Fifteen, Ma'am.

MATTIE. And how long have you been an orphan?

MARLENA. All my life.

MATTIE. So you're alone in the world, are you?

MARLENA. Well, except for the orphan asylum, yes, Ma'am.

MATTIE. That makes two of us. I'm alone too. Husband died five years ago. And my son, our only, son, Albert. *(She opens her purse, and takes out a photo for Marlena to see.)*

MARLENA. Oh, he's handsome, Ma'am!

MATTIE. Yes, he was...my boy....died in the war...over in France...my only child...My people, what's left of them, are all back in Delaware...I've been here since I've been eighteen, and they wouldn't know me...

MARLENA. You... want me to come and live with you?

MATTIE. I have a nice house with a grocery and fruit market, does real well, And I want to share it with someone, Marlena. My life has had its share of tragedies, and joys, and there's not a thing I fear in this world. Not even death. But I do fear being *alone*...in life and in my dreams...guess all women do...alone on my deathbed...I don't

want you as a maid or a nurse, Marlena. I'm in good health, still run my shop and can afford to hire help if I want to. But to have a family again, someone to care about, to laugh with, to share...a dear girl like yourself to love... *(Begins to cry, takes a handkerchief from her sleeve, gets up from crate and crosses to SL.)*...Sorry.

MARLENA. *(Crosses to her.)* It's all right, Miz Mattie...I know all about loneliness, too...Seems like I'd be perfect for you...a younger child might be way too much for you! *(They both laugh.)*

MISS SCOTT. *(Crosses DSC next to Mattie.)* So, Marlena, would like to agree to go live with Ms. Wrightman?

MARLENA. Yes, Ma'am. I think Miz Mattie and I will get along fine.

MATTIE. *(Embraces her.)* You dear, dear, girl! Thank you! I will be a loving mother to you, to be sure!

MISS SCOTT. All right, then, ladies. Looks like Divine Providence has brought the two of you together!

(MATTIE and MISS SCOTT freeze as MATTIE reaches to sign the clipboard, lights fade out and spotlight up on MARLENA as she turns and faces the audience.)

MARLENA. Mattie was true to her word, and we had a wonderful life together. I was adopted and became Marlena Wrightman and lived with Mattie where we ran the grocery together until her death at the age of 81. And I enjoyed a rich life of a good marriage, children, grandchildren and friends, a life in which I would never be alone...and Mattie was surrounded by her daughter, grandchildren, and friends at the end of hers...

(Lights up and spotlight out. MARLENA goes to the benches behind the panels. Train whistle and steam engine sound effects again.)

NARRATOR. *(Enters from SR and crosses to SL.)* May, 1919; an orphan train arrives in Iowa...*(Exits SL.)*

MISS ASHCROFT. *(At SL at the end of train benches.)* All right, boys and girls, we're in Rock Falls, Iowa. The good people of this town have been lookin' forward to meetin' you for a month now and

givin' you new homes . Be real nice and polite if they ask you any questions. Off now, take your bags, stand in a single file line...

(The CHILDREN get up and form a line outside of the benches as the ADULTS come in from SL and SR and look over the children. YAKOB steps forward to address the audience. Lights down and spotlight up on YAKOB; rest of cast freezes.)

YAKOB. It was scary; I didn't know what was goin' to happen to me. I had never been out of the city until now. The day we left, we were eating breakfast that morning, and the matron tapped me on the shoulder. "You're going to Iowa," she said. I told her, "I can't go. I'm not an orphan. My mother's still livin'. She's in the hospital." But there was no use arguing. They put me on the train that day. Never even got say good-bye to my mother.

(Lights up. Spotlight out. YAKOB goes back in the line of children. MRS. STOKES looks over him, pulls him DSCL.)

MRS. STOKES. What's yer name, boy?

YAKOB. Yakob, Yakob Levitz.

MRS. STOKES. How old are ya?

YAKOB. 13.

MRS. STOKES. You look like you'll do. Fairly strong-lookin'. Not puny.

YAKOB. *(To audience:)* And that was it. Like I was a horse or something. She signed the papers and we went to her farm.

(The rest of the CAST exits, as MRS. STOKES and YAKOB go to the crates, where MRS. STOKES sits.)

MRS. STOKES. Put your bag here. You'll be sleeping in the shed, and you'll unpack later. Now listen, here, boy. I ain't adoptin' ya. This ain't yer home, it's *mine*. My husband died two years ago, and I've been runnin' this farm ever since with two hired hands. You work for me, an' I put a roof over yer head, food, clothes, and I send yer to school till yer 15. That's all I owe ya. You earn yer keep. You'll start school in a month or so. Till then, you'll work the crops with me each day. *(Stands and faces him.)* What did ya say yer name was?

YAKOB. Yakob.

MRS. STOKES. Ya—akob? What kinda name's that?

YAKOB. For me, a perfect name... *(Looks at her.)* It means Jacob.

MRS. STOKES. Then we'll call ya Jake. Easier to say. Now go on an' take yer things out to the shed! *(She sits back on the crates. Lights fade out. Spotlight on YAKOB.)*

YAKOB. *(Looking up:)* Oy-vey! I slept in the shed that night, dank and musty, and I cried. She worked me like a mule. A mule? I should have it so good! The horse and mule had better shelters than I did! And never a kind word, not one...I felt like a slave. Like my people under Pharaoh. I wrote to the agency. Gave the letter to one of her hired hands who gave it to the town's mayor. He came by later that week.

(Lights up, spotlight out, as MAYOR CREAGAN comes from SL to MRS. STOKES, seated on a crate.)

MAYOR CREAGAN. *(Takes off his hat.)* Mrs. Stokes, ma'am, we've been gettin' reports that you haven't been treatin' that orphan boy right. Folks say you never let him off the farm...sleeps in the shed!

MRS. STOKES. He has food, clothes and a roof over his head...I ain't mistreatin' him! He works for his keep.

MAYOR CREAGAN. Like your other two boys that ran off as soon as they could? One with pneumonia? You promised us, Mrs. Stokes, you'd give better treatment! We're taking the boy, ma'am.

(They freeze. YAKOB steps forward, lights fade out. Spotlight on YAKOB.)

YAKOB. Thank God for Mayor Creagan! They put me with another family, Edward and Myra Kurtz, an older couple with a small farm. Their other children were grown, so I was like an only child. They spoiled me. But as soon as I turned eighteen, *back* to New York, to *home*, I went! Back to my old neighborhood. Mama had died the year I left, I found out, and I got invited to live with a rabbi and his family. It was good to be back home, and I *never* left New York again, after that. *(Lights up, spotlight out. Whistle blows, train sounds starts, and YAKOB gets on train.)*

NARRATOR. (*Enters from SL.*) June 1919. An orphan train leaves New York and travels west for over three weeks...

(*Exits SR. Train whistles. Orphan agent, MISS LYONS, comes forward USL, then off train with clipboard, and ushers CHILDREN in line in front of the train.*)

JUSTINA. (*Steps forward with Emma:*) I'm so scared, Emma! Where did they say we were?

EMMA. North Dakota, (*Turns around to look at train depot sign.*) Medina, North Dakota...Lord, it's cold!...how can it be cold like this in June?

JUSTINA. I feel like we're at the ends of the earth...like the train would fall off the edge if we went any further! (*They both giggle.*)

EMMA. I hope someone takes us here...I just don't want to get on that train again! I'm so tired of riding! I want to wash my face...and sleep in a bed!

JUSTINA. They have to take us...there's hardly any boys left!

EMMA. Oh, Justina...I hope we can stay best friends...maybe if we stay in this town we can see each other....

JUSTINA. I pray to God we'll be able to see each other, Emma!...you're the only person in the world who's dear to me. (*They embrace.*)

EMMA. Maybe if we tell them we're sisters, they'll take us both...

JUSTINA. Miss Lyons would scold us for lying...she has the papers on all of us...

EMMA. But we're sisters in spirit, Justina...so it ain't lying...

JUSTINA. Here (*Pricks palm of hand with a hat pin from her jacket; holds up her hand*) Now you prick your hand... (*Emma does the same*) Now put our hands together (*They clasp hands*)...now, no matter where we go, we know that we'll always be sisters...

MISS LYONS. (*Looking off to SR, as though waiting for the townsfolk, turns to the CHILDREN:*) Hush, now, children! The families are here! Line up! Stand up straight! Your best manners now!

JUSTINA. (*Looks at EMMA.*) Well, here we go again! (*They line up and the TOWNFOLK come in from SL and SR to look them over. Lights dim and everyone freezes. Spotlight on JUSTINA as she steps forward DSC.*) I was taken in by a family in Medina that night. They wouldn't take Emma, though, no matter how much I begged. "She's like my own *sister*," I said... "We left New York together...been on the train a whole *month!*"...but, no...How she cried when we said goodbye! She got back on the train with Miss Lyons—the only orphan left...and they went west to Bismark. I never saw her again. Years later I wrote to the orphan asylum, for her address. They wrote back saying she had died of pneumonia two years earlier in Bismark. She always *did* hate the cold...She was only 16....I've never had a friend so dear to me as Emma...and those days of riding the orphan train, stay with me...even now. At night, sometimes? It feels like I'm on the train again...with Emma.

(Train whistle is heard, and there is an ensemble transition in various levels to face the audience, DSC.)

ACTOR 1. I was happy, but the other kids at school would hiss... "you're adopted!"

ACTOR 2. Even though they were nice, they were strangers. It was scary sleeping in a strange bed that first night.

ACTOR 3. I was adopted and my new parents loved me, but the other kids always referred to me as the "Orphan Girl." "Little Orphan Annie", they'd call me.

ACTOR 4. They got a letter from New York. It was from my father to see if I was all right. They *hid* the letter! I didn't read it till twelve years later.

ACTOR 5. It's hard to explain. You're loved, and you know you're loved, like their own...

ACTOR 6. But it's not 100%. A part of you separates *you* from *them*...

ACTOR 7. Makes you wonder, forever...

ACTOR 8. 200,000 of us there were!

ACTOR 9. Went to New York after I was grown, to ask for my records...

ACTOR 10. But they wouldn't give them to me...

ACTOR 11. Those records are sealed. "You were adopted. Don't dwell in the past."

ACTOR 12. That's what they'd say, to anyone who asked.

ACTOR 13. But we've a right to our pasts, to our connections with ourselves, and where we came from...

ACTOR 14. And our roots are not to be thrown out, like garbage...

ACTOR 15. I remember when I was little, back in New York, speaking Italian...

ACTOR 16. Yiddish...

ACTOR 17. German...

ACTOR 1. Russian...

ACTOR 2. And now forgotten....lost.

ACTOR 3. What *was* my last name?

ACTOR 4. Do I still have people there?

ACTOR 5. Is my mother still alive?

ACTOR 6. My father?

ACTOR 7. My brother and sister, who were separated from me?

ACTOR 8. But we're all American, they'd tell us...

ACTOR 9. A big melting pot...

ACTOR 10. And we'd all help to stir the meltin' pot a little faster

(ACTORS now shift positions and begin speaking as the adoptive parents.)

ACTOR 11. If he were our own son, we could not love him more...

ACTOR 12. I always was, and still am glad that I took that boy in and raised him...

ACTOR 13. We treated her just like our own...and she gave us joy and made us proud.

ACTOR 14. No matter what I did for him, he was not happy; he was already ruined when he came to me...

(They shift positions again.)

ACTOR 15. I'm proud to have been an orphan train rider...

ACTOR 16. Lots of us turned out real well...

ACTOR 17. Found good homes...not all of us, now...but a lot us...

ACTOR 1. Some of us even made a name for ourselves...Horace Scott, governor of Alaska...orphan train rider.

ACTOR 2. Andrew Burke, Governor of North Dakota...orphan train rider...

ACTOR 3. William Bonnie.....outlaw, known as Billy the Kid, orphan train rider....

ACTOR 4. I, Hazel Romano Martin, wife, mother, piano teacher, orphan train rider...

ACTOR 5. Allison Martin Durant, daughter of an orphan train rider.

ACTOR 6. Aaron James Durant, grandchild of an orphan train rider, who went to New York for my grandmother's records...

ACTOR 7. Records found!

ACTOR 8. Records to all riders finally opened. Lineage found. Ancestry traced.

ACTOR 9. Over two million Americans...descendents of orphan train riders!

ACTOR 10. I, Hazel Romano Martin, proud of my family and proud of my heritages...proud and grateful for both.

ACTOR 11. Our heritage...

ACTOR 12. Our roots...

ACTOR 13. ...And our orphan train brotherhood...

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

In order to protect our associated authors against copyright infringement, we cannot currently present full electronic scripts.

To purchase books with the full text, and to apply for performance rights, click ORDER or go back to:

www.playscripts.com