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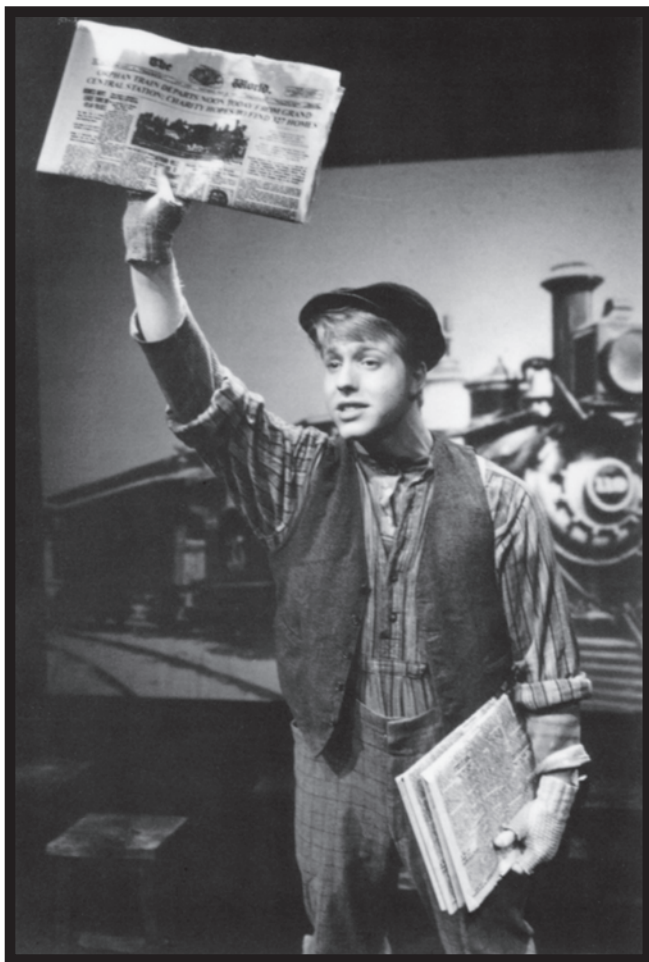
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Dramatic Publishing

THE ORPHAN TRAIN



Drama by
AURAND HARRIS

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THE ORPHAN TRAIN

Produced and developed by Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., and by New York University, the play tells the story of nine orphans on an “orphan train” that left New York City on May 28, 1914, and traveled to U.S. midwestern towns in search of homes for the children. The staging creates a highly theatrical story, moving, amusing, and always tellingly human.

Drama . By Aurand Harris. Cast: 7m., 8w., 3 boys, 6 girls, or 11 (1m., 1w., 3 boys, 6 girls) with doubling. Orphaned, unwanted children, seeking a hope of home, any home, anywhere. There’s Mary, Evie, spunky Pegeen, Annie, and Little Lucy, a quiet one. There’s Frank (who later becomes Frankie, a small girl), Raymond, Lucky, and Danny the song-and-dance boy. And there are the men and women hoping for children. The lonesome whistle wails as the train chugs between encounters of anxiety, laughter, wistfulness, rejection and acceptance. Eight stories unfold, each a memorable surprise. *The Orphan Train* is a charming heart-warmer, all we expect from one of legendary playwrights for children, Aurand Harris. *Open stage, period costumes of the day. Suitable for touring. Approximate running time: 65 minutes. Optional music score available. Code: O82.*

New York University, Program in Educational Theatre.

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The Orphan Train



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By
AURAND HARRIS



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(THE ORPHAN TRAIN)

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I wish to express my deep appreciation to five individuals who, at my request, generously read and discussed this play during its writing and offered helpful suggestions. They are Rives Collins, Orlin Corey, Laurie Brooks Gollobin and Lowell and Nancy Swortzell. To each I say “Thank you, Thank you!” And I gratefully dedicate *The Orphan Train* to them.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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The first production of *The Orphan Train* was presented by the Theatre and Interpretation Center Departments of Theatre and Performance Studies at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, March 1, 1995.

CAST

Danny Roger Ainslie
Mary Carlyn Armintrout
Lucy Genna Brocone
Raymond Michael Cotter
Harvey/Newspaper Boy Peter Duffy
Pegeen Amber Rose Gainey
Annie Erin Harper
Lucky John Kostrey Jr.
Frank Sharon Lanza
Man Brad Lofgren
Woman Ann Riekhoff
Evie Genie Sloan

PRODUCTION TEAM

Directed by Deborah A. Royals
Scenic Designer Meg Pederson
Costume Designer Kate Hawley
Lighting Designer Meg Pederson
Sound Designer Colby Bessera, Shade Murray
Dramaturg Claudia Kunin
Stage Manager Kimberly Gordon

The New York premiere of *The Orphan Train* was presented by New York University, Program in Educational Theatre, November 1 – 9, 1996.

CAST

Sarah Bailey Frank
Caitlin Bell Hicken Evie
Joseph Charnitski Mr. Williams, Henry Snyder,
Circus Barker, James, Man 1, Old Man, Man 2
Andrea Cira Mary
Alyson Cozzolina Annie
Laura Gimpel Pegeen
James Wesley Lucky
Landon Scott Heimbach Danny
Nicole Kirkorian Mrs. Herndon, Hanna Snyder, Emily,
Woman 1, Teacher, Lady 2, Woman 3
Paul Knox Raymond
Jimmy Schwertner Newsboy, Harvey
Kelsey Sheppard Little Katie

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director Nancy Swortzell
Producer Frans Rijnbout
Set Designer Roger Hanna
Costume Designer Michele Wynne
Lighting Designer Jason Livingston
Music Director Jeff Kennedy
Sound Designer Carlos Guedes
Dialect Coach Bridget Cagney

Choreographer Laura Gimpel
Stage Manager Victoria Keenan
Assistant Stage Manager Rachel Lu
Crew Chief Marjorie Lawrence

Master Electrician Eva Pinney
Props Adam Cacio
Wardrobe Jennifer Schmidt
Light Board Operator Brandi Chaney-Giles
Sound Technician Amanda Dubois
Building Crew Nicole Adelman, Monica Barbuti,
Laura Brown, Kris Diaz, Kimberly Patterson,
Jennifer Pesce, Dennis Walters, Shirley Wu
Costume Crew Jennifer Schmidt

School Performance Coordinators Jeff Kennedy
Ann McCormack

Publicity Lyn Peticolas, Sharon Rosen
Poster & Program Designer Fernando Feuereisen

THE ORPHAN TRAIN

CHARACTERS

BOYS:

NEWSBOY

RAYMOND

DANNY

LUCKY

HARVEY

JAMES

the 6 may be played by 3, if desired

GIRLS:

MARY

FRANK/FRANKIE (dressed as boy)

EVIE

PEGEEN

ANNIE

LITTLE LUCY (small child)

MEN:

MAN

HENRY SNYDER

MR. WILLIAMS

CARNIVAL MAN

OLD MAN

MAN

the 6 may be played by as few as 1, if desired

WOMEN:

MRS. HERNDON

HANNAH SNYDER

EMILY

WOMAN

LADY

TEACHER

WOMAN the 7 may be played by as few as 1, if desired

LOCATION: The play moves from a street in New York City to various Midwestern towns.

TIME: Around 1910-1914.

The History Behind the Orphan Trains

The “orphan train” movement traces its roots to 1852, when immigration began to swell the population of New York City. Overcrowding and disease were rampant, and there was a breakdown in family life. At the age of 27, dissatisfied with conventional approaches to reform, Charles Loring Brace created his own organization, the New York Children’s Aid Society. Supported by an eminent board of trustees, Brace in time developed a series of strategies that seemed to work: lodging houses for newsboys and other street children; industrial schools that offered instruction to both boys and girls in a variety of trades; and emigration, the technique for which Brace became most famous. Unable to care for all the children, Brace designed a plan to send children on trains to live with farm families in the West and Midwest. He envisioned a wholesome atmosphere for the children with clean air and healthful food. Because Brace saw crime primarily as an ecological problem, that is, a consequence of overcrowding, he looked for ways to reduce the population of New York’s most dense sections. His solution was to send thousands of children to homes outside the city on the famous orphan trains. By the mid-1890s, Brace had placed at least 90,000 children in homes outside New York City, and everyone of his surveys showed how well his strategy had worked. Most children, he reported, pleased their new families, adapted to farm life, and grew into healthy, independent adults. The actual situation was more complex. There were children who bounced from one placement to another and others who found their way back to New York. Brace had hoped to

break the ties of the children with their families, but many times the children reestablished these relations. The idea of emigration may have been a good one, but the “placing out” was not totally satisfactory in every case. The children traveled with agents (the social workers of the day) aboard westward-bound trains, in the hopes of finding a better life. Stops along the way were selected in advance. Flyers were mailed to the towns announcing the impending arrival of the children. Advertisements were placed in newspapers. A committee of townsfolk aided the agents in finding homes for the orphans. From 1854 to 1929, when the orphan trains stopped running, approximately 250,000 children were relocated.

— Deborah A. Royals

Neighbors linked by train

Orphans now in late 80s

BY DANTE RAMOS
East Jefferson bureau

For three years, Mildred Oakes has lived directly upstairs from Caroline Petrich in a Metairie condominium building. But until recently, they hadn't met or realized they had shared an incredible train ride 86 years ago.

Both orphaned in New York, they arrived in Louisiana via the railroad in 1909, with little identification tags pinned to their dresses so their new parents could find them.

They finally met last week after organizers of a Louisiana Orphan Train Riders reunion put them in touch with each other.

"My gosh, we were on the same train, and you never even came to visit!" Petrich told Oakes Thursday afternoon, sitting on an armchair in

See ORPHANS, A-4

THE DAILY PICAAYUNE

STORK ARRIVES

IN SPECIAL CAR,

Delighting Top-Tight Babies From New York

York Arhans

Demanded Wine For Mary Kere, Cass. Ing Disappetalsment,

But Mr. Butler Will Help Kere on Kent Trip.

A Doctor and a Half Served to Till Orders From the Country.

The Jan. 22, 1909, Daily Picaayune in New Orleans heralded the arrival of the 'orphan train' from New York. The article said 66 babies were on board, but many more would-be parents met the train.

Orphans:

From Page 1

Oakes' tidy living room.

Between 1907 and 1910, Sisters of Charity nuns working at the New York Foundling Hospital placed more than 2,000 children with adoptive families throughout Louisiana. The nuns pinned numbers on the babies and parents with matching numbers would claim them at the train station.

The children sent to Louisiana were only a fraction of the more than 150,000 orphans who were resettled nationwide between 1873 and 1929. Most were the children of poor immigrants.

Some of these orphans and their children have formed the Orphan Train Heritage Society. The Louisiana group first met in 1990.

Organizer Pat Bergeron, a Gretna resident, said seven or eight riders and 45 descendants of riders will attend today's reunion at Delmonico's restaurant in New Orleans.

While Petrich, 87, and Oakes, 88, now say they are proud to have ridden the orphan train, they remember the days when society stigmatized its adopted children.

"I always felt like there was something missing," Oakes said. She said she suspected that she was not her parents' biological child, but never really tried to find out because she was never that interested in meeting her biological parents.

"My parents loved me so much I wouldn't care about seeing the real ones," she said.

However, when she was about 25, she wanted to confirm her suspicion, so she asked a Mande-

ville priest to examine church records. He told her she was right.

Then, in 1958, Oakes read a newspaper article about orphan train riders and realized she might be one.

Petrich still remembers being taunted in third grade by a girl who sat behind her. "Whenever I got a better mark than hers, she would say, 'You're adopted!'" Petrich said, her voice narrowing to a hiss as she mimicked the girl.

When Petrich was 10 or 11 she learned the girl wasn't lying. Her mother kept Petrich's adoption papers in an armoire that she locked every time she left the house. One day her mother forgot to lock the armoire, and Petrich found her adoption papers, which had been drawn up in New York.

Petrich said she seldom discussed the adoption with her mother.

"She thought if you talked about it, it meant you weren't satisfied where you were," Petrich said.

Still, Petrich doggedly sought information on her background. On a trip to New York in the early 1930s she went to the New York Foundling Hospital and asked a nun to see her records.

"She held those records to her bosom. I can still see her," Petrich said.

"Now it's compulsory. They have to give it to you," she said.

"They should!" Oakes said.

Oakes finally wrote to the hospital in 1991, requesting details about her history. She said she regretted not having investigated sooner.

"I thought I had let so much time elapse," said Oakes, who always had been preoccupied with

her children and her job at Tulane University, where she worked for 30 years.

She discovered that her birth family's surname was Prievogle or Prievogel.

"It's a strange name," Oakes said. "I've never heard it before or since."

It was Oakes' son, who wondered if he might be a descendant of a powerful Park Avenue patriarch, as well as an immigrant housekeeper, who urged her to trace her roots.

Oakes attended the 1990 reunion in Lafayette.

Petrich said she learned about the 1995 reunion when her daughter came across an announcement for it in "Crossroads," the Orphan Train Heritage Society's newsletter. A former civil servant and assistant to Sen. Russell Long and Gov. Earl Long, she still works occasionally as a storyteller.

Bergeron, 55, said the reunions help both the orphans and their descendants understand their lives. Her father, who died in the mid-1940s, was a rider.

"For me, this is like going to a family reunion," she said.

Oakes remembers the 1990 reunion as slightly awkward. After all, she says, the only thing she had in common with the only other rider who attended was a train trip many years ago.

Yet even many decades later, Petrich maintains that being an adopted child is never an insignificant detail and that all adopted children share a feeling of apartness.

"Now it means that you were loved," she said. "But it's never 100 percent. You're always placed in a different category."

THE ORPHAN TRAIN

(Time: Around 1914. Place: Street in New York City.

Stops of the Orphan Train.

As the stagelights come up and the houselights dim out, a train whistle is heard. Then a second whistle. NEWSBOY enters in front of the curtain and calls.)

NEWSBOY. Extra! Extra! Read all about it! May 28, 1914, President Woodrow Wilson speaks at Arlington National Cemetery. New York City burns in heat wave. Another orphan train goes west. *(Suddenly he is interested.)* Orphan train? *(Reads with difficulty.)* “City over-run...with homeless children. Orphanages...overcrowded... Police sweep streets of ragamuffins.” *(Looks up.)* That’s me. *(Reads.)* “City sends...unwanted children...by train...to Midwest farms...to foster homes.” *(Looks up.)* The police ain’t got me—not yet. *(Calls and exits.)* Extra! Extra! Read all the news. Another orphan train goes to Midwest.

(The sound of a moving train is heard. Followed by two train whistles.

(The play can be performed on a bare stage with stage draperies. Across the back of the stage, nine stools are in a straight line, the last stool being quite small for LITTLE LUCY. Or if a more elaborate set is used, a backdrop of an enlarged map of north central Missouri is seen. The map is informal outlines showing also a part of southern Iowa, the western part of Illinois and the eastern part of Kansas. Two lines with crossties represent a railroad track running from Chicago to Kansas City, the old Rock Island Railroad line. The following small towns indicated by circles represent the stops which the train makes. East to west, Princeton, Spickard, Trenton, Jamesport, Gallatin, Altamont, Winston and Cameron. Between each scene, when the lights dim, a small light is seen behind the drop, a flashlight, moving from town to town as the train progresses west. Again, no scenery is needed. As the curtain opens, the nine children are discovered standing downstage. They are, left to right, MARY, FRANK, RAYMOND, EVIE, LUCKY, PEGEEN, DANNY, ANNIE and LITTLE LUCY. They all speak as one, except LITTLE LUCY who cannot talk.)

ALL. We ride the orphan train, the orphan train
Deserted, unwanted children, seeking, searching for a
home.
We come with a hope to find a home, any home,
anywhere.
Some do. Some do not.
We ride the orphan train, the orphan train.

(A moving train is heard and a whistle. Children all turn, walk to the stools, and sit. Another whistle.)

SCENE ONE, Mary

(MARY rises, steps forward to C. She is a shy young girl, poorly dressed.)

MARY. The train ride was exciting—if it hadn't been so crowded. Boys in one section. Girls in another. We passed farms with cows, sheep. I had never seen a cow or sheep. And apples hanging on trees, instead of in boxes at the store. The first stop was at Princeton. I didn't know what to expect. They took us to a church and rang the big bell, and folks came to look at us. Some took the ones they wanted home with them. Home. That's what they said at the orphanage...I'd have a home—somewhere—out here. There were too many of us in the orphanage. I was standing in the church, the bell ringing; and people looked at me. Who—who I thought will take me—home? I didn't look up. I didn't try to show off like some of the kids. I was scared. *(Shyly looks down during following scene.)*

(MRS. HERNDON, a plain country woman, enters from side.)

MRS. HERNDON. Here's a quiet one. What's your name?

MARY *(head down, hardly audible)*. Mary.

MRS. HERNDON. Eh? Speak up.

MARY *(head still down)*. Mary.

MRS. HERNDON. Mary? That was my sister's name.

Humph! I never liked her. I reckon we could change your name. I'm looking for a girl who can help me around the house, keep me company. Can you do that?

MARY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. HERNDON. Speak up. What's the matter? The cat got your tongue.

MARY. No, ma'am.

MRS. HERNDON. Well, I don't know. You're clean and quieter than most of the other wild heathen they have sent us. Why, there's a boy down the line there—the swarthy one—who was uppity enough to tell me that his name was Jesus.

MARY (*to audience*). I didn't say anything to her, but there was two Mexican boys in the orphanage and their names were Jesus.

MRS. HERNDON. I could call you Rebecca. I always liked that name. It's from the Bible. Yes, Rebecca will do. You look strong and healthy. So I'll try you out. We'll sign the papers saying I'll look after you.

MARY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. HERNDON. Look up, and speak up, child.

MARY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. HERNDON. And remember your first name is Rebecca. (*Goes to R.*)

(All the children seated, turn on their stools, facing the back.)

MARY. I signed my name "Rebecca Smith." Smith was the name they gave me in the orphanage. Later at her house, she sat me down for a talk (*sits in chair at R, by MRS. HERNDON*) like I was a pupil and she was the teacher.

MRS. HERNDON. Now sit up straight and—look at me!—and hear what I have to say. These are things you are to

do and to know while you're under my roof. First: I ain't adopting you. This isn't your home. It's mine. You, you are like a hired girl that's living in. I'll feed you, clothe you, send you up to school, and pay for your essential things. But I don't believe in foolishnesses or wasting money.

MARY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. HERNDON. Second: You, in return, will help with the work and keep me company. It gets lonely living here by myself. You'll go to church and say your prayers every night.

MARY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. HERNDON. Give thanks you're out of the dirty city, out here where there's fresh air and sunshine, good plain food, and you've got a roof over your head. You have lots to be thankful for, miss.

MARY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. HERNDON. Now we'll get supper. First you can fetch some wood for the stove.

MARY (*rises*). Yes, ma'am.

MRS. HERNDON. Well, don't just stand there. Move.

MARY. Where—where is the wood?

MRS. HERNDON. On the wood pile! (*MARY looks around.*) By the woodshed, out the back door.

MARY (*hurries to L and mimes the action*). I hurried to the woodpile, got an armload, and hurried back, but some of it fell off before I got to the stove.

MRS. HERNDON. Be careful! You clumsy girl. Now you've made a mess on the floor. Get the broom and sweep it up.

MARY. Yes, ma'am. I swept it up. Then when I was carrying a bucket full of water from the pump in the yard, I spilt some water on the rug on the back porch.

MRS. HERNDON. Now look what you've done! I never saw such an awkward girl! Hang the rug on the clothesline so it will dry.

MARY. Yes, ma'am. I tried to please her, but everything I did was wrong.

MRS. HERNDON. Now I want you to go down in the cellar and get a crock of milk—and don't spill it!

MARY (*to audience*). Cellar? I had never heard of a cellar. What—what is a cellar?

MRS. HERNDON. It's a cellar. A cave. Dug in the ground where you keep things cool. Stupid, stupid girl. Do you see that mound of dirt there—there by the privy?

MARY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. HERNDON. Humph! (*Calmly.*) I want you to go out to that mound of dirt—the cellar—open the door that's even with the ground, go down the steps into the little room, and on the floor is a crock of milk. Pick it up, and bring it carefully up the steps and into the kitchen. Is that clear?

MARY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. HERNDON. And don't spill it!

MARY (*nods, mimes hurrying to R, to the one-step unit, pulling up and opening imaginary cellar door, steps on step, then steps down, and takes a few more steps*). I hurried to the cellar, lifted up the door, and started down the stone steps. In the little room at the bottom was a covered crock of milk, sitting on the floor. Something scurried across my foot and disappeared in the corner. (*She screams.*) It was a mouse. (*Frightened.*) I picked up

the crock, held it tight, and started up the stairs. And on the steps was another mouse. I closed my eyes—and screamed—and spilt the milk all over me and the steps.

MRS. HERNDON (*goes to the step unit*). What are you doing now? Great heavens! You've spilt all the milk. Stupid, stupid, stupid! There'll be no supper for you. And you can stay in the cellar where you spilt the milk. (*She mimes shutting the imaginary door, as MARY stoops and sits on the step.*) Teach you a lesson. Not to be so wasteful, so clumsy. (*Locks door.*) There. You're locked in. You can spend the night there—thinking of what you did. Awkward, stupid girl. I'm sorry I took you in. I don't want you. (*Exits.*)

MARY (*crying*). I sat there on the cold steps, alone, in the dark—thinking—thinking, nobody wants me. Nobody. When morning came, I heard voices outside.

(*MR. WILLIAMS enters with MRS. HERNDON.*)

MR. WILLIAMS. You locked her in the cellar all night!

MRS. HERNDON. It was the right punishment—where the crime was committed.

MARY. It was Mr. Williams who'd come to check on the homes where the orphans were.

MRS. HERNDON. I'll let her out now, and I hope she's learned a lesson.

(*Mimes opening cellar door. MARY stands up and comes "out" of the cellar, shaking with fear.*)

MR. WILLIAMS. Mary, are you all right? (*Goes to her and holds her.*)

MRS. HERNDON. I don't want her.

MR. WILLIAMS. Yes, Mrs. Herndon. Poor child, she's shaking. It's all right, Mary. It's going to be all right. The Murphys couldn't be at the church yesterday and they want a girl, a pretty, young girl, like you.

MRS. HERNDON. The Murphys? Helen Murphy with her highfaluting ways, and him, always laughing and telling jokes. They'll spoil her.

MR. WILLIAMS. We will see. I am sorry she didn't work out for you. And I am sorry you scared the poor child to death.

MRS. HERNDON. I did what was right. She learned a lesson.

MR. WILLIAMS. Get your things, Mary.

MARY. I don't have nothing.

MR. WILLIAMS. That's all right. I'll take you to the Murphys. Goodbye, Mrs. Herndon. I hope you have a pleasant day.

MRS. HERNDON. Humph! (*She exits L. He exits R.*)

MARY. The Murphys lived in a big beautiful house. Mrs. Murphy was beautiful and wore pretty clothes. Mr. Murphy did laugh a lot and told funny jokes, and they did spoil me. My own bedroom—all blue with ruffles and a closet full of clothes, friends, and parties and a little dog all my own. It was like coming to the end of the rainbow, and there was a wonderful home. They didn't call me Rebecca. No. They called me Mary, their little princess—and I was.

(Stagelights dim down and MARY exits. Moving train sounds are heard. There is one whistle, and then an-

other. Stagelights come up bright. Children have turned on their stools and are now facing audience.)

SCENE TWO, Frank

(A young tough boy rises and steps to C.)

FRANK. I was the toughest kid on the block in the city. I slept in alleys, in boxes, whatever. Swiped things to eat on Mulberry Street. I was doing all right. Until the cops blew their whistle and rounded up us homeless kids that night, and put us on a train. We didn't know where we was going. But it was different. It was fun. It was an adventure! I got me a seat by the window, looked out, and saw the country. Now way out here in nowhere, the train stopped at Spickard. They herded us up to the courthouse steps and there we stood, lined up like horses for the country folks to have a look at. I chewed on a weed and spit and let 'em know I was from the city. Nobody came near me. When the folks had picked the ones they wanted, the rest of us what was left, we was put back on the train and rode to the next stop. There, same thing happened. Only this time a man and his wife singled me out. He was a funny bird with a twinkle in his eye.

(HENRY SNYDER and HANNAH, his wife, enter.)

HENRY. What's your name, buster?

FRANK. It ain't Buster.

HENRY. Oh?

FRANK. They all call me Frank.

HENRY (*amused*). All right, Frank. Let's go home.

(*He and HANNAH exit. The line of children turn and face the back.*)

FRANK. We drove in a wagon out to their farm. Mrs. Snyder—that was their name—began to get supper and said I should wash up. We'd been on the train for days, and I WAS grimy—even for me. And smelled something awful.

(*HENRY and HANNAH enter.*)

FRANK. Wash? Where's the pan?

HANNAH. I mean—wash from the hide out. Get the wash-tub. There's water in it, sun-heated, and put the tub in the woodshed. There's soap and a towel in there. And don't spare the soap!

FRANK. So I drug the washtub into the woodshed and shut the door.

HANNAH (*calls*). Throw your clothes out, and I—I will burn them. You can wear some of Henry's things until we get to town for some proper ones for you.

FRANK (*shocked*). She means I have to wash all over! Well, the water's warm, and—I can't remember when I really washed all over—so—I did! (*Exits R.*)

HANNAH. It's all very well for you, Henry. He can help you with the chores on the farm. But I wanted a girl, and I still do.

HENRY. Well, a girl would be nice. But we NEED a boy. And I like him.