

THANKSGIVING AT THE ORPHANAGE

No one likes orphans. That's the primary cause of orphanism. If anyone cared about orphans, anyone at all, there wouldn't be any orphans. They'd have been adopted by now.

Instead, you sit on an assigned cot, rusty springs screeching with each minute movement, in the now-empty and always dreary dormitory of Sainte Sister Mary of the Blessed Li'l Chilluns' Home for the Unwanted and Unloved Whom We Will Want and Love, Albeit Temporarily, Until A More Permanent Familial Arrangement Might Be Found. And you're blubbering away and blowing snot bubbles while Sister Mary Schwartz berates you, though in a kindly manner.

"You don't see the other children in here alone and feeling sorry for themselves, do you, young man? No, you don't," she continues, not waiting for your answer, which wasn't forthcoming, anyhow, not with your current, sorry emotional state. "That's because all the other little boys and girls were adopted; they aren't orphans any more."

"And do you know why?" Again, no pause for response: "No one wants you. Your real parents certainly didn't. If I had to guess, which I definitely don't, but I will nonetheless, that's probably why they died.

"Look, I empathize with your position. I really do. It's just that... couldn't you at least pretend to be cheery when prospective parents visit the facility? That's what they want, you know: smiles and shiny morning faces and the possibility of precociousness. Until one of them takes a liking to you, we're both stuck. You're stuck here; I'm stuck with you. And I'm fairly certain that neither of us want this," she indicates your surroundings with sweeping arms and exasperated eyes.

"Don't you know any tricks? That'd be just the thing. A trick. It doesn't have to be some spectacular feat of prestidigitation. We'll start simple, yes?"

"Try this: look up at me with endearing doe eyes and whisper in your sweet, prepubescent voice: 'Please, sir, will you be my daddy?'"

"Your goal here is to elicit in others the instinctive, protective nature that childless adults feel for children. Think trusting. Think eager and expectant and anticipative. Now, you try..."

"Yes, right. Okay. Good. Um. That's... uh, that's a start. Not a particularly good start, but a start nonetheless." She crosses herself and glances Heavenward for succor and support. "I'm going to eschew my immediate gut reaction to what you just did and stick to constructive criticism.

"You've got the doe eyes bit down pat, though you could perhaps tune down the appearance of recent, unattractive sobbing. And could you maybe wipe away some of that snot? Whoa, okay, slow down. Not with your sleeve. Snot on the sleeve does not speak to adoptive material. Use this handkerchief, yes? In sum: what you just did, but snotless, and maybe also with less redness around the eyes. Those elements simply serve as a reminder that children are whiny and filthy and rank. Let's not remind our prospective new mommy and daddy about that disagreeable factor, shall we? They'll find out soon enough. In this instance, we're going for hopefully forlorn. Not miserably whiny. Try perhaps maybe pretending - you do like to pretend, don't you? Pretend that you don't live in this festering hellhole, working your fingers to their tiny, little bones under the austere direction of my cloistered sisters and instead that you've simply been momentarily misplaced. Yes, right. That's it! That's your motivation: Helpless child in need of passing aid and assistance. And... scene!

"Right. Okay. What part of this are you not comprehending? I want to help you; I really do, but this task is Sisyphean enough as it is without at least some modicum of effort on your part. I realize that you're only four-years-old and lack formal dramatic training, but it really is in both of our best interests if you get this right.

"Let's try this again, shall we? Think cuddly and cute and kind. Think lost puppy.

"Okay, well, that was none of those things, but we've plenty of time before the next visitation period to work on this.

"Let's look on the bright side, as our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Herbert Christ, erstwhile implored. The bright side isn't particularly dazzling, I'll admit, but tomorrow is Thanksgiving and we've some scrumptious canned cranberry sauce left over from the food drive last month and perhaps we can convince the cook to warm up a bit of lovely turkey breast cold cuts for supper. Won't that be nice, hmmm? I'm certainly not certain what you have to be thankful for, nor I, when I think about the mess that my life has become, but at least you have years ahead of you and plenty of time to turn your life around."