

The Blissful Orphans

By Kyle John Schmidt

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CHARACTERS

Patrisha – co-proprietor of the Blissful Orphanage.

Luther – Patrisha’s husband and co-proprietor of the Blissful Orphanage.

Mr. Coddlesworth – an orphan-catcher. Carries a net. Suffering from Loneliness¹.

Justine Everlast – a captain of industry. Wears sunglasses. Suffering from Disappointment¹: a disease that affects her vision and can render her blind.

SETTING

A Dickensian orphanage.

¹ In this play, Loneliness and Disappointment are widely accepted medical conditions and not moods/emotions. This is not a new idea, as Thomas Mann wrote in *Magic Mountain*, “Symptoms of disease are nothing but a disguised manifestation of the power of love; and all disease is only love transformed.”

(The interior of The Blissful Orphanage. LUTHER waves farewell to an orphan leaving with her new parents. PATRISHA, Luther's wife, stands beside him. She is very distraught.)

LUTHER

Fare thee well, Little Jessica! Pleasant journeys to your new home! Enjoy your new parents! Never forget your time at the Blissful Orphanage! *(To PATRISHA:)* That was the worst orphan we ever had. Picked her nose. Talked out of turn. Chewed up the furniture. And that once! What she said.

PATRISHA

“Pull my finger.”

LUTHER

I didn't know. So I did. And then. That tiny girl. Just. Loud. Sonorous. Woke the neighbors. Broke the chair.

PATRISHA

But I loved her.

LUTHER

(Emotional:) I loved her too.

PATRISHA

Now our orphanage is empty.

LUTHER

And Christmas is tomorrow!

(PATRISHA and LUTHER cry together.)

PATRISHA

Luther. Our orphans get too much love and care.

LUTHER

Patrishia, there's no such thing as too much love and care.

PATRISHA

If our orphans weren't so well-fed and wondrously groomed, they wouldn't be adopted so quickly and we might still have one in the orphanage to dote upon.

LUTHER

It's not your fault.

PATRISHA

It is! My gruel is too tasty.

Well I shouldn't offer seconds.

LUTHER

I run too many baths.

PATRISHA

I shouldn't add the bubbles.

LUTHER

We give too many hugs.

PATRISHA

Break these arms so they may never hold an orphan again!

LUTHER

And all those bonnets I made for Christmas. Who will wear them? I should have given one to Little Jessica.

PATRISHA

She would have eaten it.

LUTHER

Now I can imagine no worse terror than my bonnets boxed in the attic, gathering dust, unable to halo an orphan's brow.

PATRISHA

We'll get more orphans.

LUTHER

You don't know that.

PATRISHA

I bet there's a farmer. Somewhere. With kids. And he's struck down by lightning.

LUTHER

What of his wife?

PATRISHA

Taken by plague.

LUTHER

They'll have relatives somewhere.

PATRISHA

LUTHER

Lost at sea. All of them!

PATRISHA

It would be a Christmas miracle.

LUTHER

Look! Over there! Walking up the lane!

PATRISHA

Is it an orphan?

LUTHER

No. It's Mr. Coddlesworth! Our orphan-catcher!

PATRISHA

I bet he brought us some orphans!

(MR. CODDLESWORTH, the orphan-catcher, arrives looking very glum.)

MR. CODDLESWORTH

I haven't got any orphans.

LUTHER

Then what are you doing here? Go weave a net. Go set a trap. Catch us an orphan!

MR. CODDLESWORTH

I just came from the doctor. The medical doctor. I got a diagnosis. It's bad. She says I've got it. I've definitely got it.

PATRISHA

Got what?

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Loneliness. I never knew Loneliness was a sickness. It is. I got it. Sad face. Slumped shoulders. And oversharing. It comes and goes. I can't control it. I could talk about it for days. If you'd let me.

LUTHER

How did you get Loneliness?

MR. CODDLESWORTH

My doctor thinks it's a mix of occupational factors and lifestyle. Being an orphan-catcher. Living in your shed. Having no one to love.

PATRISHA

Is there a cure?

MR. CODDLESWORTH

My doctor believes there's only one hope. And that's to get an orphan. So I've come to adopt that Little Jessica creature.

LUTHER

Oh, Mr. Coddlesworth.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

I know she's your last orphan. And chews furniture. But I don't care. I can't handle Loneliness anymore.

LUTHER

We can't give you Little Jessica.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

But I thought you liked me. I considered us friends. Don't be stingy with your orphans!

PATRISHA

Little Jessica was adopted!

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Oh. Tragedy. My Loneliness is here to stay.

LUTHER

But you could catch us more orphans.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

From where? There aren't any left.

PATRISHA

Who's taking all the orphans?

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Millionaires. They've cleared the alleys. Scoured the sewers. Raided the boxcars. Snatched all the orphans to raise in their mansions. You'll have to close this place. We'll have to get new professions.

PATRISHA

We can't get new professions. We only know orphans! Making gruel. Whimsical songs. Bonnet-making.

LUTHER

And we have Masters degrees. In Orphanomics and Orphanography. Certificates in Orphantology. Fluency in Orphonics.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Then you'll have to go back to school.

PATRISHA

But we have student loans!

MR. CODDLESWORTH

You're young. You have each other. You can start over. I'm older. I'm alone. No one likes me. No one cares for me. I have nothing. Just me. And my Loneliness!

(MR. CODDLESOWRTH cries.)

(JUSTINE EVERLAST, a captain of industry, arrives. She currently has vision problems.)

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Is this the Blissful Orphanage? Do I hear a sobbing orphan?

LUTHER

That's no orphan.

PATRISHA

He's our orphan-catcher.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Don't talk about me like I'm not— Justine Everlast?

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Mr. Coddlesworth?

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Over here. No, this way. Right here. Oh Justine! I haven't seen you in ages.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

And I won't see you for ages more. For I have recently acquired a very quizzical ocular ailment. All I see are indefinite shapes and blurred colors. My doctor believes it's a symptom of a very acute case of Disappointment. Who knew Disappointment was a disease? I didn't. Now I do. As do all of you.

PATRISHA

Who is this?

MR. CODDLESWORTH

This is Justine Everlast.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

But I don't know Mr. Coddlesworth. And we have never met before.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Justine.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

It is the way it was and the way it must be.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Oh. My Loneliness! It overtakes me. I leave. To weep. Alone! Unless someone stops me. Or joins me. And no one is. So I'm really going. I'm gone.

(MR. CODDLESWORTH has exited.)

PATRISHA

What brings you to the Blissful Orphanage?

JUSTINE EVERLAST

I am a captain of industry with an immense empire of business pursuits and a mansion. I can buy anything. I can own anything. I go on many dates. But still there's a hole in my heart that my wealth and power and desirability cannot fill. This morning, I discovered my ex-husband and his chirpy wife had acquired an orphan. I always wanted an orphan, but during our marriage he claimed to be allergic. So now I'm single, I require an orphan. Superior intellect. Good at jokes. Won't chew the furniture.

LUTHER

Terrible new, Ms. Everlast: we have no orphans.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

But my doctor said an orphan is the only hope for my Disappointment.

PATRISHA

Wait, we have one orphan left!

LUTHER

Patrishia, the last one was adopted.

PATRISHA

I confess my sin: I've been keeping orphans from you. Let me retrieve the little angel.

(PATRISHA exits.)

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Don't feel bad. My husband kept things from me. Another wife. A different house. A desire to have an orphan. My doctor believes that's where I got my Disappointment.

(MR. CODDLESWORTH leaps into the room.)

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Or perhaps you got your Disappointment before that. At a love you lost much earlier.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Mr. Coddlesworth! I confess: I loved you. I have always loved you. But my parents. They forbade you.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

But I only met them the once.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

You made a dreadful impression.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

You thought I was funny. I made you laugh.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

But that time. What you said. In front of my parents.

LUTHER

What did he say?

JUSTINE EVERLAST

I shouldn't. I couldn't. I can't!

LUTHER

You must!

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Pull. My. Finger!

LUTHER

Mr. Coddlesworth!

MR. CODDLESWORTH

I was young. I didn't know better.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

My mother gagged. My father cried. You broke a chair. And my parents never let me see Mr. Coddlesworth again. It was the worst moment of my life.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

I am sorry I brought you so much pain. I leave. To make soup and think about my feelings. Unless you want me to stay. And say so. Or use a hand gesture. But you're doing nothing. So. I'm going. Really gone. This time.

(MR. CODDLESWORTH exits.)

JUSTINE EVERLAST

My vision fades. Worse and worse. And now the dreaded verdict: I am blind!

(PATRISHA enters wearing a bonnet. She is posing as an orphan.)

PATRISHA

Hello everybody!

JUSTINE EVERLAST

What is this before me? I think I see—

LUTHER

My wife Patrisha?

JUSTINE EVERLAST

No, the cutest orphan child I've ever laid my eyes upon.

PATRISHA

My name is Geranium Bonnets. I'm nine.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

And you're already this tall? Can you imagine what she'll be at nineteen? Taller than trees. A Goliath in skirts. I could ride on her shoulders. See the horizon. Touch the sun. I would never be Disappointed again. I'll take her.

LUTHER

I need a moment with Geranium Bonnets, alone, to ensure she has thought this through.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Of course. But keep it short. Because even though I am walking into the light of day, every moment without an orphan I descend into darkness.

(LUTHER leads JUSTINE EVERLAST to the exit.)

LUTHER

Patrisha! Why are you posing as an orphan?

PATRISHA

Mr. Coddlesworth is right: our orphanage is doomed and we must find new lives. I'm not qualified for other occupations. My education: useless. My work experience: irrelevant. I am suited for just one job.

LUTHER

Scam artist? Legacy hunter? Crook!

PATRISHA

No. Orphan. I was good at being a child. Why can't I go back to being what I'm good at? Everyone loves you more when you're a child. When you have potential. I haven't potential any longer, Luther. No one cares if I solve a puzzle. Or concoct a wild story. Or paint a pretty picture. But now. With these clothes. This wonder. I feel so hopeful. Maybe my entire life has been leading up to me being a child. Again.

LUTHER

Patrisha. No. You can't. I won't allow it.

PATRISHA

Try and stop me. (*Yelling:*) Mother! Help! Oh help!

(*JUSTINE EVERLAST enters.*)

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Geranium Bonnets, what is it?

PATRISHA

He won't let me be adopted.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

I have heard that people who run orphanages are wicked bullies, but I wouldn't believe it until I saw it through the impenetrable fog of my own eyes. I hereby make Geranium Bonnets an adopted orphan.

PATRISHA

Mother!

JUSTINE EVERLAST

My little girl!

LUTHER

I hope your orphan knows that when she leaves, the gruel will go rancid, tears will fill the baths, and the bonnets will grow mold. For she is the bliss in this Blissful Orphanage. And these walls and these arms mean nothing without her living blissfully within them. Farewell.

(*LUTHER exits.*)

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Your years of interminable abuse in this orphanage are over, Geranium Bonnets. Don't look back. You must never look back. Because my Disappointment won't let me see what lies ahead.

(They begin to exit. MR. CODDLESWORTH enters.)

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Justine Everlast! Stop! If you require an orphan to cure your Disappointment then I present one who has no one to care for or be cared for. Myself.

(LUTHER enters wearing a bonnet. He is now posing as an orphan, too.)

LUTHER

Hello, everybody!

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Mr. Coddlesworth, do you see what I see?

MR. CODDLESWORTH

My friend Luther in a bonnet?

JUSTINE EVERLAST

No. It's an orphan. With a beard! How novel!

LUTHER

I'm Ruddy Bonnets. Geranium Bonnets' twin.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Twin orphans! If I could see, I would wonder if my eyes are deceiving me!

PATRISHA

Ruddy Bonnets. Go back to the orphanage. It's where you belong.

LUTHER

I belong with you. You can leave the orphanage, but let me come along!

JUSTINE EVERLAST

My heart is melting at the roaring fires of love—that one sibling might have for another. Is this what you want, Geranium Bonnets?

PATRISHA

I don't know what life lies ahead. But I do know. That I don't want another, for he is my one, my only, my husband and lover.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

What?

PATRISHA

I mean, twin brother.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Are you thinking what I'm thinking, Mr. Coddlesworth?

MR. CODDLESWORTH

I doubt it.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Twins were not meant to be separated. I can't do it. So I won't! I want the bonnets. Both of them.

LUTHER

We've been adopted!

PATRISHA

Geranium and Ruddy Bonnets won't be parted!

JUSTINE EVERLAST

I should be more clear: I'm a captain of industry. I'm very busy. I can't handle two orphans. So I don't want you. I want your bonnets. That you're wearing.

LUTHER

Our bonnets?

JUSTINE EVERLAST

One for me. And one for whom I love more than any other. My one, my only, my twin brother!

LUTHER

What?

PATRISHA

She means lover.

JUSTINE EVERLAST and MR. CODDLESWORTH

Ugh. No. Gross. Catch up.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Mr. Coddlesworth is my twin brother.

LUTHER and PATRISHA

What?!

JUSTINE EVERLAST

It's a tragic tale.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Our father struck by lightning.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Our mother taken by plague.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

Our other relatives lost at sea. All of them.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

And we were placed in an orphanage.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

She was adopted. I was not.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Due to a tragic finger-pulling incident.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

I became an orphan-catcher. But I was never able to catch the orphan I was looking for. Until now. My sister, Justine.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

And I got the orphan I always wanted. My brother, Mr.

LUTHER

His name is Mr.?

PATRISHA

I never knew.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

You never asked.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Mr. Coddlesworth, say you'll come live in my mansion.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

What riches abound! A home and a sister! My Loneliness evaporates!

JUSTINE EVERLAST

And my vision clears! My Disappointment is gone! As are Ruddy and Geranium Bonnets.

LUTHER

They ran back inside the orphanage.

PATRISHA

Where they'll stay.

LUTHER

Together?

PATRISHA

Yes, forever.

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Come, Mr. Coddlesworth, on our way home I must show you off to my ex-husband, his chirpy wife, and their new orphan, Little Jessica.

MR. CODDLESWORTH

They adopted Little Jessica?

JUSTINE EVERLAST

Yes. Why?

MR. CODDLESWORTH

I hope they don't have wicker.

(JUSTINE EVERLAST and MR. CODDLESWORTH begin to exit.)

LUTHER

Fare thee well. Pleasant journeys to your new home! Never forget your time at the Blissful Orphanage!

(JUSTINE EVERLAST and MR. CODDLESWORTH pause.)

JUSTINE EVERLAST

These bonnets are really very lovely. Someone should sell these. They'd make a killing.

(JUSTINE EVERLAST and MR. CODDLESWORTH exit.)

PATRISHA

Oh! Husband. My eyes.

LUTHER

Have you gotten Disappointment?

PATRISHA

No. The world is brighter. More hopeful. Clearer. I think I have contracted Excitement!

LUTHER

What? How!

PATRISHA

Those bonnets. I know how to make those bonnets. We can sell the bonnets!

LUTHER

Oh. My wife. You've given me your vision.

PATRISHA

Let's go! Now! To the square! We'll hawk bonnets to last-minute Christmas shoppers!

LUTHER

"Ho, ho, ho, you're giving bad gifts, if you don't buy one of our bonnets!"

PATRISHA

Oh Luther!

LUTHER

Why are you crying?

PATRISHA

We have potential. Again.

THE END