

# **THE HUNT FOR HAPPINESS**

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The Hunt for Happiness by Annie Vivanti Chartres

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**ANNIE VIVANTI CHARTRES**

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FOR HAPPINESS**



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BY

ANITA VIVANTI CHARTRES.

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## PREFACE.

### *Cui Bono?*

What is the good of writing a book? What is the good of reading it? What is the good of living? Or of anything else, for that matter?

I might have made the story prettier, and finished them all off happily; landed the young ones in the haven of matrimony, the pathetic ones in the grave, and sent the bad ones out, reformed, to begin new lives.

But young people do not come to an end with marriage; and pathetic people grow middle-aged and stout; and God does not keep new lives for bad people to slip on over their sins like a set of ready-made clothes.

I might have written a story with a moral to it; that would have been improving.

But, again, what is the good of improving?

I need not have written the story at all. What is the good of it?

Perhaps that is what God will say when the dead worlds come rolling in at his feet at the end of Eternity.

# THE HUNT FOR HAPPINESS.

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## I.

"DOT," said Jack, from the sofa, "stop that row."

Dot pretended not to hear, and went on with her irritating Czerny Etude, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, all the way up the piano in scales of C major, with occasional aggravating chords in the left hand. Jack raised himself on his elbow and looked at her. The back of her sleek brown head was obstinate and her small shoulders demure, as she put down the loud pedal, and tinkled, tinkled tinkled all the way down again in precise, inevitable scales.

"Stop that row, or I'll make you," repeated her brother, balancing his book and unmistakably taking aim at her. Dot wheeled round on her music stool, with her face all puckered up.

"Oh, Jack, you promised I might practise to-night."

"Then I unpromise," said Jack. "It's time for you to go to bed."

"It isn't," said the little girl. "It's only a quarter past nine, and I never go to bed until ten. How you ever expect," she continued querulously, "to make an infant prodigy out of me, and have me go out starring with Lea, I don't know. I'm getting dreadfully old—nearly fourteen—and I can't play anything but that Lucrezia Borgia piece."

"And a hideous thing it is," said Jack.



"Well, I'm never allowed to practise. When Lea is in, she says it bothers her. And in the morning, you all sleep till two o'clock, and I mayn't make any noise. Oh!" she said, beginning to strum again with one hand, "I wish we had mammas and papas and aunts about the house to make me learn things and to slap me and take care of me."

"Well, I slap you, don't I?" said Jack.

"That's a different kind of slapping," replied Dot, putting her other hand on the piano in a casual manner, and keeping up the conversation while she played. "Mammas slap to do one good, and you slap to hurt."

"I believe I told you to stop playing," said Jack, in the bland tones that spoke of horrible and well-remembered chastisement, to the mind of his little sister. Her hands dropped from the keys.

"You needn't worry about that infant prodigy business any more," said Jack. "Lea earns enough to keep us all. And then, of course, there are my patients."

"You haven't many," sneered Dot. "There's only cook; she takes your medicines and doesn't pay. And then there's Frank, who pays and doesn't take your medicines. And he only does that because he's in love with Lea."

"Shut up, cheeky, and go to bed," said her brother.

Dot slammed the top of the piano down, banged her music on to it, and shut the lid with a crash. Jack, who had been watching, threw his book at her.

"Bring that book here, you brat!" he said, as Dot was about to leave the room.

"Shan't," said Dot.

"I believe I asked you——" began Jack, suavely, and pretending to rise. Dot flew for the book.

"You bully!" she said, as she gave it to him. Jack caught her by the wrist.

"Send Mollie," he said; "send her here at once. Tell her to bring me a glass of water. Do you hear?"

"Yes," said Dot, meekly, leaving the room. Then she put her head in at the door again. "Beast!" she said, and disappeared.

Jack stretched himself, put his feet up on the arm of the sofa, and lit his pipe. The intermittent flame of the match threw strong lights and shadows on his face. It was a clever face, with big eyes, a big nose, a big moustache, and not much chin. He looked like an exaggeration of Dot. She had the same large blue eyes; his were larger and bluer. She had the same curved nose, but hers curved like the nose of a sheep, and his like the beak of a falcon. She had a small chin, and he had next to none. His mouth was hidden by the heavy moustache, but the underlip had the sulky droop of his little sister's weak, pretty, petulant mouth.

The match went out. He smoked in long, leisurely whiffs, blinking at the gaslight. The room was closed and warm and bright. On a table near him some half-faded roses were drooping sleepily over a vase, dreaming of open gardens and eager morning winds. He turned and puffed some of his pipe-smoke into their wan flower-faces, and made them smell of stale tobacco for the rest of their short pink lives.

"Shall I put it down on the table, sir?" said Mary, coming in with a glass of water on a large tray. She was an old servant, and she looked tired and greasy. She shook the water all over the tray, when Jack turned suddenly and snarled:

"What do *you* want? I didn't send for you. I want Mollie."

"Please, sir," said the old woman tremulously, "Mollie's upstairs doing Miss Lea's room."

"Call her down; I want her," said Jack. "Go away. I don't like dismal old faces around me."

"Shall I leave the water, sir?"

"Take it away. I don't want it," said her master, kicking off one of his slippers in the direction of the glass.

Mary waddled off with the tray. She was rather shaky in the knees from age and rheumatism and overwork, and from being always scolded and startled and screamed at. She bumped up against the door and spilled some more of the water.

"Drunk again?" asked Jack, mildly. Mary stopped and came back. The tears gathered in her little red eyes, slid down along her wrinkles and stopped at her chin. She could not rub them off, because she was holding the tray with both hands, and the glass was slipping about on it in the spilt water.

"I'm not drunk, sir, no sir," she said brokenly, "and please, sir, I'd like to speak to you about—about Mollie, sir."

Jack lay motionless, staring at her with his eyebrows half-way up his forehead in a disconcerting way.

"I think, sir—I'm sure I beg pardon—but I—I—Mollie's got to go away!" She finished with a rush.

"What the hell are you talking about?" asked Jack, quietly.

"Well, sir, she's my sister's child," said Mary, weeping over the tray, "and I don't like to see such goings on—as I—as I see. She's a good girl, sir—leastways she always was before coming here, and I want her to keep steady and marry Joseph, as was arranged. He's a good man, and a good coachman, as you know, for you pay him good wages—and he'll be a good husband to her—"

Jack was sitting up on the sofa.

"Will you get out?" he roared. "Will you leave off?"

Mary got out of the room as fast as she could.

"Send Mollie! Send Mollie at once!" he called after her.

"What a house! What a house!" said Mary.

In answer to her summons, Mollie, the maid, said over the banisters that she'd go to the drawing-room when she felt like it. She felt like it about two minutes after, and ran downstairs with a crackling of starched