

Happiness Hunting

A Play in One Act by
Bo Anderson

LIST OF CHARACTERS:

- Man:** 33 years old and dressed like a farmer and has a small empty mason jar on a string around his neck.
- Woman:** 30 years old and wearing a safari hat, khaki shirt and shorts, and a boot knife.
- Happiness:** 20 year old female, blond hair, and wearing a "Happiness" T-shirt

Setting:

The play transpires inside a forest that was burnt to the ground some time ago. A few blades of grass, or other vegetable matter, are shooting up through the ashes in a small patch.

(A burnt forest is littered with ash and blackened tree stumps. Happiness enters and gives all the necessary information for the curtain speech)

Happy:

Hello. Good evening and welcome to this performance of "Happiness Hunting". Ok, what do I have to say, oh right, um please turn off your cell phones and pagers, anything that beeps or vibrates, I don't want to know what it is, just please turn it off. The emergency exits for this theatre are located right over there and there. (*Insert necessary curtain speech information here*) That's all I have to tell you, and now for the remainder of this performance I will be presenting to you the audience the character of Happiness, but you know I'm not really happiness. No, I'm just here to represent happiness. Really I'm just a girl who bought a shirt that says "happiness". I bought it at a Wal-Mart. It was cheap. 5 bucks I think. Not bad considering it came all the way here from China! And believe you me China is a really long ways away, I tried digging there in my back yard when I was a kid and I didn't even get close! (Noise from off stage) Yeep! I got to run; you see there is this crazed woman chasing after me. Well, she's not after me the person, but more Happiness in general, and she thinks that I can somehow give that to her. You all probably would do the same if you could. Maybe not, but just remember that I'm not really happiness, just a metaphor! Well, maybe not a metaphor. What's the word for someone who represents something, but only for a limited time, and only in venues like this one? Well that's what I am, and I have feelings, real ones.

(**Happiness** hurriedly runs off stage)

(**Woman** enters and follows roughly the same path across the stage as **Happiness**. She pauses roughly where Happiness delivered her speech. Touches the ground and smells the scent on her fingers.)

Woman:

I'm getting closer. She was just here, standing here not two minutes ago. She shifted her weight nervously as she stood here. She's getting tired of the chase; it won't be too much longer now.

(**Woman** exits in the same direction as **Happiness**)

(**Man** enters carrying a rake and rakes the ashes)

Man :

I know what it looks like, but no I'm no farmer, nope, quite the opposite in fact. No, I just live here and maintain the place. I call it my forest, but it's not mine, in that I own any deeds to the place. I don't really own anything, I'm more of a squatter, and as far as I know I am the only person who comes here. I like it here, it's quiet, peaceful. Hell, there ain't even the sounds of damn birds chirping, wind blowing, grass growing or anything like that, not for miles. Nothing grows here anymore, not since the fire. I like it better that way, it's clean. So I live here and try and keep nature from rebounding. The best part is that out here, in these woods, you won't find any of those granola munching hippie hiker types. You can find them all over their groomed hiking trails through their National Parks and what not. They can trudge through the mud in their Nikes and gortex sports pants and all smile and say a friendly, "Hey, how are you?" to the strange mirrors walking opposite them in the wilderness. Soft machines with too much time on their hands all looking for Natures Disney land, but hey, if that's their escape then fine. Everyone needs to get away from themselves somehow, but this here is mine. This sometimes it is the only thing keeping me going, these moments of absolute silence. Can you hear it? Isn't it wonderful?

Happiness :

Yeeeeeeeeeee!

(**Happiness** screams and runs across the stage, followed by a short of breath **Woman**)

Man :

No, no, no! What the hell was that? They can't be in my forest, what the hell would anyone be doing way the hell out here? There's nothing out here! I hope they don't come back, they better keep running. I hope they keep running, they don't look like they will be coming back. Its ok. Sit down and relax. Calm yourself. 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... INHALE 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... EXHALE. INHALE; smell the familiar forest, Exhale, let it all go. INHALE... EXHALE... Ok, I'm calm. They won't be coming back, they've been here and seen the place, and they are done with it, right? What is there-

Happiness :

-HELP ME!!!

(**Happiness** screams and runs across the stage with **Woman** in hot pursuit)

Man :

What do you want, what are you doing, get the hell out of here! Yes, yes, like that, just like that keep going!!!

(**Happiness** re-enters screaming and running. **Man** steps into her path way to try and confront her but she quickly runs around him. As his eyes follow **Happiness** running away from him **Woman** runs in and crashes into **Man**. **Woman** has a big fall and ends up on the ground)

Woman :

Damn it!

(**Woman** curls up on the ground and weeps punching the earth)

Man :

What the hell was that and who the hell are you? What are you doing in my forest? I said what the hell are you doing here? I don't want you here, you just have to leave.

Woman :

I can't!

Man :

Leave!

Woman :

No.

Man :

I need my time alone, this is my only me time you see, and you are ruining it. Ok, ok, you are hurt, so here let me help you up and then you can go. No, no, don't lay back down, you got to keep moving. You have to get up and leave now! Come on, up you go-

Woman :

-Stop touching me, Leave me alone!

Man :

I have to say I'm not impressed. Are you just going to continue lying there? Are you ever going to stop crying? Hello, are you there?

Woman :

-Go away!

Man :

Go away? Go away? You go away! Go on get! This is my forest, you understand? Mine. Besides, you're the one making all the noise. I think you should stand up and stop crying now, and then you can leave. Please leave! I don't like it when you're here. I work very hard to maintain the forest this way so that no one will come here. Ok, ok, fine. You can stay there, but just don't move or talk or anything. I have a lot of work to do. (**Man** goes back to raking the set but doesn't take his eyes off of **Woman**) Why don't you leave? This is a really boring and bad place to be, and I don't think you'd like it here.

Woman :

I don't like it here at all, if only you hadn't gotten in my way. I was right behind her... If you hadn't gotten in my way I would have been gone already. (Wiping tears away)

Man :

So you're blaming me then?

Woman :

Yes.

Man :

Ok, that's fine, just blaming me then, but you're the one who ran into me. You're the one who wasn't watching where you were going.

Woman :

So what?

Man :

So what? You ran into me, you ran into me and you're the one that's doing all that crying ruining my day, that's so what! Running into people, crying, and ruining their day is a lot to be so what about!

Woman :

Well, I'm sorry I ruined your day. I ran into you on accident, I'm sorry. Clearly I have offended you, and I am sorry for that too. But I'm in no shape to get up and leave at the moment, so if it would be alright with you I'd like to stay here a minute and recuperate. Would that be alright with you?

Man :

What? Oh, ok, yeah that's fine. That's fine.

Woman :

Thank you

Man :

That will do. Ok. I accept this situation, it is temporary. It won't last, and I can keep a level head. You'll eventually leave, and everything will eventually be ok. I accept you being here, you can stay, and right there and only there, for a little while, and then you have to leave.

Woman :

I'll leave as soon as I can.

(**Woman** Sniffles)

Man :

(Sniffs) Do you smell that?

Woman :

What?

Man :

There's something on the wind!

Woman :

Is it the girl?

(**Man** smells his way towards and finally finds the blades of grass growing out of the ash)

Man :

God Damn it! NO, NO, NO!!!

Woman :

(Frightened) What?

(**Man** is on all fours furiously pulling out the grass)

Man :

This is your fault, you see this? This is your fault. I can't let you distract me anymore; I've got to get back to my work. I can't stop; I can't afford to stop working.

(**Man** picks up rake and begins manically raking)

Woman :

What are you doing?

Man :

Can't let the forest grow back around me now can I? I've lost too much ground already. You see this here, this is most of what's left, I just can't keep up with the raking as it is, and you've gone and put me behind!

Woman :

I'm SORRY!!! Didn't I just say that? You don't want me here, you've got things to do, and I get it. I don't want to be here, I've got things to do, do you get that?

Man :

Well, no. I hadn't really thought of it that way I guess. So why are you crying? I mean, I'm guessing its not because you fell down, I fall down all the time and don't cry about it, so you must be sad for other reasons is what I am thinking, am I right? Are you sad for other reasons?

Woman :

Yeah.

Man :

Well what is it, what were you crying about?

Woman :

That girl that I was chasing after-

Man :

-Yes? What about her?

Woman :

When she's running and I'm running after her it's like I don't have to think about anything else. I think I remember I was working at a bookstore when I first saw her. She was wearing that shirt, and the word HAPPINESS was glowing. She was walking in slow motion past everyone. She was smiling and everyone was smiling back at her. She was contagious like a disease. I was drawn to her, but when I tried to touch her she moved away. As she moved away I moved after her. She started to run, and I ran after her. I've been chasing after her for so long. Chasing her is all that I have; I can barely remember anything else. I almost had her. I was so close... When I'm chasing her I feel free, like everything is easy and new. I ran into you and now I have nothing. I can feel the emptiness swelling up inside me.

Man :

Oh.

Woman :

I'll never catch up to her again. She's gone! I'm sorry I broke down and cried in your forest. I'll be able to leave soon.

Man :

Oh, I've cried before you know. Along time ago, but I remember just the same.

Woman :

You? What did you ever cry about?

Man :

Oh, let me see... I was a little boy. Yes, I was a little boy alone in the woods-

Woman :

Oh that is sad.

Man :

No, that's not the sad part yet.

Woman :

Oh, sorry.

Man :

It's ok, its fine... Where was I? Ah, I was a little boy alone in the woods and I was chasing after the clouds, or the fog in the morning you know, and I was trying to capture it inside a mason jar. Trying to seal it up inside with the cap you know.

Woman :

Did it work?

Man :

The jar looked gray, like it had the cloud inside it, as if I had done it. I had captured the cloud; I was so happy, so excited! But whenever I tried to take my prize home with me, whenever I left the border of the fog sure enough my jar was just as empty as before. No matter how many times I tried to fill the jar, no matter how hard I worked at it, it always ended up empty in the end. It wasn't fair. It was all I ever wanted, and nothing worked.

Woman :

So is that when you started crying?

Man :

No. You see, I wasn't sad yet, I tried anger first.

Woman :

Anger? Does that help?

Man :

It's a natural part of the process of healing.

Woman :

But does it help?

Man :

It's a bit destructive, anger is, and well at least it is when you act out on it.

Woman :

What did you do?

Man :

Well, I guess I kind of, I didn't do anything really important. I just declared war on the clouds is all.

Woman :

What? You did what?

Man :

I declared war on the clouds; you see I was very political in my youth.

Woman :

I see. How did you, I mean how does one fight a war with the clouds?

Man :

It's a matter of preferences; I suppose everyone would do it in their own way.

Woman :

But how did you do it?

Man :

Well, to be perfectly honest, I guess I, I burnt the forest down.

Woman :

You did that, you burnt these trees down? I can't believe you would do something like that, its horrible why would you do that?

Man :

It couldn't be helped, and the trees were harboring the clouds. I didn't really have a choice, what else could I do? You'd do the same thing if it were you.

Woman :

No I wouldn't.

Man :

Well we'll never know now will we?

Woman :

Poor trees.

Man :

Unfortunately the fire didn't really solve the cloud problem.

Woman :

No I didn't think it would.

Man :

But it was a beautiful fire. It lasted for days and days; the fire was so bright that you couldn't even see the stars at night.

Woman :

All right, that's enough, I just don't get it. So when the hell did you start crying?

Man :

Well I was at war with the clouds you see.

Woman :

Yeah, I got that.

Man :

Well the war never ended, or rather I never won. You see this jar, it's still empty, and that's sad.

Woman :

That's not very sad, I mean, I wouldn't cry about that.

Man :

Well I don't know if you've noticed but you are not crying about anything right now. You're not even red eyed and poofy like before, and I bet you feel a little bit better now don't you.

Woman :

Yeah, I guess.

Man :

Your tears are just a memory now, just like mine.

Woman :

Something like that.

Man :

Here let me help you up, so you are feeling better now?

Woman :

Yeah.

Man :

So you are going to leave then. You are going to leave right now?

Woman :

Yeah, I've got to go. I've got to keep looking for Happiness. I can probably pick up on her trail, her scent is still fresh. You, if you wanted to, you could come with me and we could find her together.

Man :

Chase Happiness you say, with all that running around, it looks like a lot of work to me. Nope. Sorry, that's not my kind of thing. I've got to stay here and tend to my forest.

Woman :

Then stay right here and do whatever you want, but I've got to go look for her. I can't just stay here and give up, I have to keep going.

Man :

Your chase awaits you.

Woman :

The chase, yes the chase, that's all that I want.

Man :

So you are leaving then?

Woman :

Yes.

Man :

Well I guess I hope you find what you are looking for.

Woman :

Goodbye.

Man :

Goodbye. (**Woman** exits) I don't think she'll find her again. That Happiness girl sure could run she is probably miles away by now!

Woman :

(From off stage) I FOUND HER!!!

Man :

She's running away right? Don't let her turn back this way!

(**Man** Runs after **Woman** and exits)

Woman :

(From off stage) What are you doing here? You scared her off, now I have to start all over again! (Re-enter **Man** being pushed by **Woman**) Would you please just stay here?

Man :

But-

Woman :

I don't need your help and I don't want it.

Man :

But-

Woman :

Listen to me, you are going to make me angry and the next time you follow me I'm going to make you cry.

Man :

No!

Woman :

Yes, and you don't want to cry do you?

Man :

No.

Woman :

So what are you going to do from now on?

Man :

Stay right here.

Woman :

Excellent!

Man :

Good bye! (**Woman** exits) Well, I'm glad she's gone. I've been living here for years and no one has ever bothered me like that before. Mostly, if and when anyone else comes by, they just sit there in the shadows and listen, like you all are doing right now. I like it here when it's quiet. It's easier for me to relax and just be myself. I can just relax and take in the scenery. Nobody's bothering me. I can do whatever I want. The possibilities are endless.

(**Happiness** runs onstage towards **Man**)

Happiness :

Help me, please help me, she's after me! She's crazy! She's trying to hurt me!

(**Man** tries to avoid getting caught by **Happiness** but she eventually wraps her arms around him hugging him desperately)

Man :

What are you doing here? Get away from me you hear, go on get! Hey, get off me-

Happiness :

-I think she's trying to kill me. Please don't let her hurt me.

Man :

You're going to have to let go of me! Let go! (**Man** struggles to free himself) Ok, ok, it'll be ok. You just got to let go of me, we can work this all out and then you can leave-

Happiness :

You have to help me, please help me!

Man :

Calm down, calm down, shush, shush now.

Woman :

-There she is. You have her. We have her!

Man :

I didn't want her, get her off me! I mean, she just came to me. I didn't want this, she just ran to me and won't let go! She makes me feel... I hate it! Get her off, get her off!!!

Happiness :

Please help me!

Man :

She's not going to hurt you. It'll be just fine you'll see. Its fine everything is fine, you just have to let go of me. Get off me!

(**Woman** Slowly drawing a knife and threatening
Man)

Woman :

-Give her to me. I don't want to have to hurt you.

Man :

Hey, wow, what are you doing with that knife there?

Woman :

She's mine you understand?

Man :

Yeah sure, she's yours.

Happiness :

No! Please!

Woman :

I want you to very slowly hand her over to me.

Man :

If I give her to you will you leave? Leave me and my forest alone? I just want to be left alone. I've got lots of work to do. I have to get back to my work.

Woman :

If you give her to me we will both leave and never come back.

Happiness:

Please! Please help me!

Man:

Ok, you can have her. All I want is to be alone. I like it better when it's quiet.

Happiness:

No! No, please, I can't give you what you want!

(**Happiness** struggles and escapes. Man and Woman chase after her, tackle her and wrestle on the ground)

Man:

Everything will be easier if you just stop struggling.

Happiness:

(Gasping) -Please stop.. Let me go! It's not supposed to be like this.

Man:

Stop struggling!

Happiness:

Let me go!

Woman:

I won't let you escape again!

Happiness:

You're hurting me! It hurts! Stop!

Woman:

Stop struggling!

Man:

No, oh no, no!

(**Man** and **Woman** stop struggling with **Happiness**. **Happiness** stands up holding the hilt of a knife that is stuck in her chest.)

Happiness:

Can I, can I please ask you a question? Can I ask you a question? I just want to ask you one question. Please, can I ask a question? Please can I... (**Happiness** falls over dead)

Man :

What have you done?

Woman :

What happened, I didn't do it. I didn't want to do it. It was an accident; I wasn't thinking. I had the knife, but I forgot, and then it just went in. She's so soft, I didn't mean it!

Man :

She's dead.

Woman :

I didn't want to kill her. Why would I want to kill her that wouldn't make any sense? It was an accident, it just happened. What do we do now, what are we supposed to do?

Man :

Maybe we should bury her.

Woman :

I don't know. How do you bury Happiness?

Man :

With a shovel?

Woman :

Do you have a shovel?

Man :

No, I only have a rake.

(**Man** picks up rake and starts moving ash onto **Happiness'** body)

Woman :

Stop, we shouldn't bury her, it doesn't feel right. I think we should leave her like this.

Man :

Why?

Woman :

I'm not sure exactly. Maybe someone will come by while we are gone and learn something from this. I don't know. I don't want to cover her up. It would be like trying to hide it. Something in my gut is telling me that we should leave her like this.

Man :

Ok.

Woman :

Are you going to stay here?

Man :

I don't know. I don't like it here anymore, not with all that's happened, but this is all I know. I don't like it here but I don't know if I can leave, not yet. Are you leaving?

Woman :

I have to keep moving, it's what I do, besides there's nothing here for me anymore.

Man :

Oh.

Woman :

You could come with me if you want.

(There is a long pause in which **Man** stares at his empty mason jar. He is clearly unwilling to leave. **Woman** picks up a handful of ash and moves towards **Man**)

Man :

What's that? What are you doing?

Woman :

Trust me

(**Woman** fills **Mans** Mason jar with the ashes. There is a physical change to **Man**, he is no longer empty)

Woman :

I don't want to be alone right now, would you mind walking with me for at least a little while?

Man :

I suppose I could go with you for a little while. Walking though right? Walking? I don't think I'd keep up with you if you did that running kind of stuff.

Woman :

No walking is fine, just fine, as long as we keep moving.

Man:

Ok.

(**Man** and **Woman** exit together walking slowly.
Pause. Happiness stands up)

Happiness:

I'm not really dead, and I was never in any real danger. This has all just been a performance you see. I had to pretend like I was dead because that's what they expected of me. They're both stuck in this cycle you see. We do this stuff all the time, in fact we'll be doing it again tomorrow night if you want to see it again. I hope you've had fun. That's it. The story is over. Well at least for now. The End!