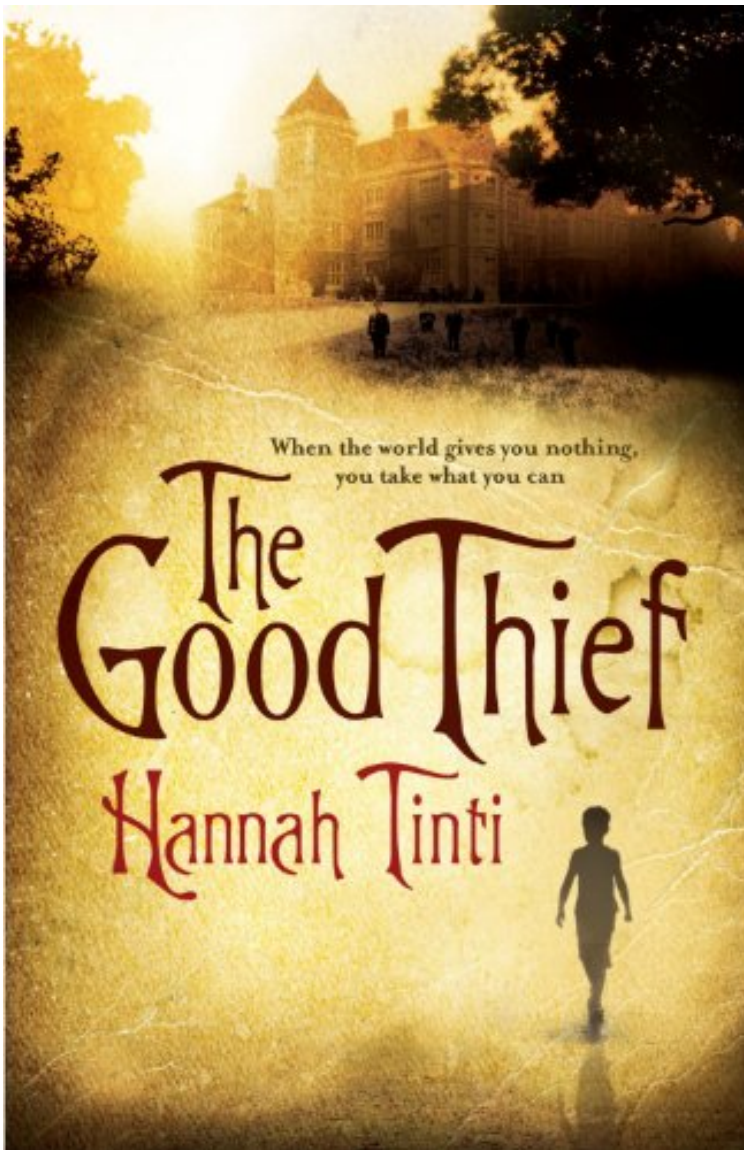


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The Good Thief (English Edition)



Par Hannah Tinti
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSet in the wild, seamy and extremely strange America of the nineteenth century: a historical novel so richly involving and so touching that you never want it to end. Young Ren is missing his parents and a hand and doesn't know what happened to any of them. So he is beginning to fear that he will never be claimed from his cold New England orphanage: that his dream of a family - of a life - will come to nothing. But one day a glamorous stranger arrives at the orphanage. To Ren's astonishment, the charming Benjamin Nab says he is his brother, come to bring him home. And even when his stories grow more and more extraordinary, when he puts Ren's life in danger again and again and sets him first to theft and then to grave-robbing, Ren cannot quite abandon hope. That one day all the hunger and danger and unwanted

excitement will be worth it, that he will find a family. But whether Benjamin is to be trusted is another story...ExtraitChapter OneThe man arrived after morning prayers. Word spread quickly that someone had come, and the boys of Saint Anthonys elbowed each other and strained to catch a glimpse as he unhitched his horse and led it to the trough for drinking. The mans face was hard to make out, his hat pulled so far down that the brim nearly touched his nose. He tied the reins to a post and then stood there, patting the horses neck as it drank. The man waited, and the boys watched, and when the mare finally lifted its head, they saw the man lean forward, stroke the animals nose, and kiss it. Then he wiped his lips with the back of his hand, removed his hat, and made his way across the yard to the monastery.Men often came for children. Sometimes it was for cheap labor, sometimes for a sense of doing good. The brothers of Saint Anthonys would stand the orphans in a line, and the men would walk back and forth, inspecting. It was easy to tell what they were looking for by where their eyes went. Usually it was to boys almost fourteen, the taller ones, the loudest, the strongest. Then their eyes went down to the barely crawling, the stumbling two-year-oldsstill untainted and fresh. This left the in-betweens those who had lost their baby fat and curls but were not yet old enough to be helpful. These children were usually ill-tempered and had little to offer but lice and a bad case of the measles. Ren was one of them.He had no memory of a beginningof a mother or father, sister or brother. His life was simply there, at Saint Anthonys, and what he remembered began in the middle of thingsthe smell of boiled sheets and lye; the taste of watery oatmeal; the feel of dropping a brick onto a piece of stone, watching the red pieces split off, then using those broken shards to write on the wall of the monastery, and being slapped for this, and being forced to wash the dust away with a cold, wet rag.Rens name had been sewn into the collar of his nightshirt: three letters embroidered in dark blue thread. The cloth was made of good linen, and he had worn it until he was nearly two. After that it was taken away and given to a smaller child to wear. Ren learned to keep an eye on Edward, then James, then Nicholasand corner them in the yard. He would pin the squirming child to the ground and examine the fading letters closely, wondering what kind of hand had worked them. The R and E were sewn boldly in a cross-stitch, but the N was thinner, slanting to the right, as if the person working the thread had rushed to complete the job. When the shirt wore thin, it was cut into bandages. Brother Joseph gave Ren the piece of collar with the letters, and the boy kept it underneath his pillow at night.Ren watched now as the visitor waited on the steps of the priory. The man passed his hat back and forth in his hands, leaving damp marks along the felt. The door opened and he stepped inside. A few minutes later Brother Joseph came to gather the children, and said, Get to the statue.The statue of Saint Anthony sat in the center of the yard. It was carved from marble, dressed in the robes of the Franciscan friars. The dome of Saint Anthonys head was bald, with a halo circling his brow. In one hand he held a lily and in the other a small child wearing a crown. The child was holding out one palm in supplication and using the other to touch the saints cheek. There were times, when the sun receded in the afternoon and shadows played across the stone, that the touch looked more like a slap. This child was Jesus Christ, and the pairing was proof of Saint Anthonys ability to carry messages to God. When a loaf of bread went missing from the kitchen, or Father John couldnt find the keys to the chapel, the children were sent to the statue. Saint Anthony, Saint Anthony, come bring what Ive lost back to me.Catholics were rare in this part of New England. A local Irishman whod made a fortune pressing cheap grapes into strong port had left his vineyard to the church in a desperate bid for heaven before he died. The brothers of Saint Anthony were sent to claim the land and build the monastery. They found themselves surrounded by Protestants, who, in the first month of their arrival, burned down the barn, fouled the well, and caught two brothers after dark on the road and sent them home tarred and feathered.After praying for guidance, the brothers turned to the Irishmans winepress, which was still intact and on the grounds. Plants were sent from Italy, and after some trial and error the brothers matched the right vine with their stony New England soil. Before long Saint Anthonys became well-known for their particular vintage, which they aged in old wooden casks and used for their morning and evening masses. The unconsecrated wine was sold to the local taverns and also to individual landowners, who sent their servants to collect the bottles in the night so that their neighbors would not see them doing business with Catholics.Soon after this the first child was left. Brother Joseph heard cries one morning before sunrise and opened the door to find a baby wrapped in a soiled dress. The second child was left in a bucket near the well. The third in a basket by the outhouse. Girls were collected every few months by the Sisters of Charity, who worked in a hospital some distance away. What happened to them, no one knew, but the boys were left at Saint Anthonys, and before long the monastery had turned into a de facto orphanage for the bastard children of the local townspeople, who still occasionally tried to burn the place to the ground.To control these attempts at arson, the brothers built a high brick wall around the property, which

sloped and towered like a fortress along the road. At the bottom of the wooden gate that served as the entrance they cut a small swinging door, and it was through this tiny opening that the babies were pushed. Ren was told that he, too, had been pushed through this gate and found the following morning, covered in mud in the priors garden. It had rained the night before, and although Ren had no memory of the storm, he often wondered why he had been left in bad weather. It always led to the same conclusion: that whoever had dropped him off could not wait to be rid of him. The gate was hinged to open one way in. When Ren pushed at the tiny door with his finger, he could feel the strength of the wooden frame behind it. There was no handle on the childrens side, no groove to lift from underneath. The wood was heavy, thick, and old a fine piece of oak planed years before from the woods beyond the orphanage. Ren liked to imagine he felt a pressure in return, a mother reaching back through, changing her mind, groping wildly, a thin white arm. Underneath Saint Anthonys statue the younger boys fidgeted and pushed, the older ones cleared their throats nervously. Brother Joseph walked down the line and straightened their clothes, or spit on his hand and scrubbed their faces, bumping his large stomach into the children who had fallen out of place. He pushed it now toward a six-year-old who had suddenly sprung a bloody nose from the excitement. Hide it quick, he said, shielding the boy with his body. Across the yard Father John was solemnly approaching, and behind him was the man who had kissed the horse. He was a farmer. Perhaps forty years old. His shoulders were strong, his fingers thick with calluses, his skin the color of rawhide from the sun. There was a rash of brown spots across his forehead and the backs of his hands. His face was not unkind, and his coat was clean, his shirt pressed white, his collar tight against his neck. A woman had dressed him. So there would be a wife. A mother. The man began to make his way down the line. He paused before two blond boys, Brom and Ichy. They were also in- betweens, twins left three winters after Ren. Broms neck was thicker, by about two inches, and Ichys feet were longer, by about two inches, but beyond those distinguishing characteristics it was hard to tell the boys apart when they were standing still. It was only when they were out in the fields working, or throwing stones at a pine tree, or washing their faces in the morning that the differences became clear. Brom would splash a handful of water over his head and be done with it. Ichy would fold a handkerchief into fourths, dab it into the basin, then set to work carefully and slowly behind his ears. It was said that no one would adopt Brom and Ichy because they were twins. One was sure to be unlucky. Second-borns were usually considered changelings and drowned right after birth. But no one knew who came first, Brom or Ichy, so there was no way to tell where the bad luck was coming from. What the brothers needed to do was separate, make themselves look as different as possible. Ren kept this information to himself. They were his only friends, and he did not want to lose them. Standing together now the twins grinned at the farmer, and then, suddenly, Brom threw his arms around his brother and attempted to lift him off the ground. He had done this once before, as a show of strength in front of two elderly gentlemen, and it had ended badly. Ren watched from the other end of the line as Ichy, taken by surprise, began to recite his multiplication tables, all the while struggling violently against his brother, to the point that one of his boots flew into the air and sailed past the farmers ear. Father John kept a small switch up the sleeve of his robe, and he put it to work now on the twins, while Brother Joseph fetched Ichys boot and the farmer continued down the line. Ren put his arms behind his back and stood at attention. He held his breath as the man stopped in front of him. How old are you? Ren opened his mouth to answer, but the man spoke for him. You look about twelve. Ren wanted to say that he could be any age, that he could make himself into anything the man wanted, but instead he followed what he had been taught by the brothers, and said nothing. I want a boy, said the farmer. Old enough to help me work and young enough for my wife to feel she has a child. Someone whos honest and willing to learn. Someone who can be a son to us. He leaned forward and lowered his voice so that only Ren could hear him. Do you think you could do that? Father John came up behind them. You dont want that one. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* Every once in a while - if you are very lucky - you come upon a novel so marvelous and enchanting and rare that you wish everyone in the world would read it, as well. *The Good Thief* is just such a book - a beautifully composed work of literary magic. That masterpieces don't come along very often only makes it more wonderful to experience (Elizabeth Gilbert author of *EAT, PRAY, LOVE*) A confident whirl of a read, with pathos and drama nicely juxtaposed (Guardian) A sensitive tale, beautifully told (She Magazine) It may be too quaint to imagine there are still families reading aloud together at night (so many Web sites, so little time), but if you're out there, consider Hannah Tinti's charming first novel. Set in the dark woods of 19th-century New England, *The Good Thief* follows a bright, one-handed orphan through enough harrowing scrapes and turns to satisfy your inner Dickens (Washington Post) Tinti is lavish with her storytelling gifts, which are prodigious (New York Times

Book) [A] moody, twist and assured first novel.... Tinti secures her place as one of the sharpest, slyest young American novelists (Entertainment Weekly) Much-trumpeted debut novel featuring Ren, a one-handed orphan in 19th-Century New England. When rugged stranger Benjamin Nab takes charge of the lad, claiming to be his brother, Ren is soon left wondering just where the truth lies (Mirror) A wonderful historical adventure strongly influenced by Poe, Dickens, and Patricia Highsmith. An excellent debut novel (Harper's Bazaar, Australia) 'A confident whirl of a read, with pathos and drama nicely juxtaposed' (Guardian) A beautiful novel, a dazzling debut (Sunday Telegraph, Sydney) 'Every once in a while - if you are very lucky - you come upon a novel so marvelous and enchanting and rare that you wish everyone in the world would read it, as well. The Good Thief is just such a book - a beautifully composed work of literary magic. That masterpieces don't come along very often only makes it more wonderful to experience' (Elizabeth Gilbert (author of Eat, Pray, Love)) 'A sensitive tale, beautifully told' (She magazine) 'Every once in a while - if you are very lucky - you come upon a novel so marvelous and enchanting and rare that you wish everyone in the world would read it, as well. The Good Thief is just such a book' (Elizabeth Gilbert, author of Eat, Pray, Love) 'A joy to read... well-drawn, evocative characters and fantastical imagination' (Metro) 'It may be too quaint to imagine there are still families reading aloud together at night (so many Web sites, so little time), but if you're out there, consider Hannah Tinti's charming first novel. Set in the dark woods of 19th-century New England, The Good Thief follows a bright, one-handed orphan through enough harrowing scrapes and turns to satisfy your inner Dickens' (Washington Post) 'Tinti ... has created one of the freshest, most beguiling narratives this side of Oliver Twist... Ren... is a child for our own time: loving, wary and ravenously hungry for home' (Oprah magazine) 'a beautiful novel, a dazzling debut' (Sunday Telegraph, Sydney) '[a] moody, twist and assured first novel.... Tinti secures her place as one of the sharpest, slyest young American novelists' (Entertainment Weekly) 'Much-trumpeted debut novel featuring Ren, a one-handed orphan in 19th-Century New England. When rugged stranger Benjamin Nab takes charge of the lad, claiming to be his brother, Ren is soon left wondering just where the truth lies *****' (Mirror) Orphan Ren has no idea where his parents or one of his hands went. But when Benjamin Nab turns up claiming to be his brother, his life goes from dull to dodgy - thieving and grave robbing are just some of Ben's plans for Ren' (OK magazine) 'Hannah Tinti has written a lightning strike of a novel--beautiful and haunting and ever so bright. She is a 21st century Robert Louis Stevenson, an adventuress who lays bare her character's hearts with a precision and a fearlessness that will leave you shaken' (Junot Diaz (author of The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao)) 'A wonderful historical adventure strongly influenced by Poe, Dickens, and Patricia Highsmith. An excellent debut novel' (Harper's Bazaar, Australia) 'A touching story you won't want to end' (Northern Star) 'Tinti is a writer of considerable skill... The Good Thief is enjoyable. Its characters hover for a long time after the book is finished, not in the terrifying way of the aforementioned authors' but in a way that challenges our notions of good and evil. Ren's struggle to stay good when surrounded by bad men offers one of life's great conundrums: which way might any of us fall? Perhaps the greatest fears rest in a question such as that' (Weekend Australian)