



# A Good Man Is Hard to Find

*Flannery O'Connor*

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## Summary

A man named Bailey intends to take his family from Georgia to Florida for a summer vacation, but his mother, (referred to as "the grandmother" in the story) wants him to drive to Tennessee. She argues that his children, June Star and John Wesley, have never been to Tennessee and shows him a news article about an escaped murderer called The Misfit last seen heading to Florida. The next day, Bailey takes his family to Florida anyway. The grandmother wakes up early to hide her cat, Pitty Sing, in a basket on the floor in the back of the car. (She is worried that the cat would die while they were gone.) Bailey finds her sitting in the car, dressed in her best clothes and an ostentatious hat; she says that if she should die in an accident along the road, she wants people to see her corpse and know she was refined and "a lady." The Grandmother talks continuously during the trip, trying to engage her two grandchildren in games and telling them jokes and a story, all of which they ignore with disdain. She recalls her youth in the Old South. She reminisces about how much better everything was in her time, when children were respectful and people "did right then." When the family stops at an old diner for lunch, she talks to the owner, Red Sammy, about The Misfit. He and the grandmother agree that things were much better in the past, that the world at present is degenerate, and she agrees with Sammy's remark that "a good man is hard to find."

After the family returns to the road, the grandmother begins telling the children a story about a mysterious house nearby with secret passages, a house she remembers from her childhood. This catches the children's attention and they want to visit the house, so they harass their father until he reluctantly goes through with it to let them take a side trip. As he drives them down a remote dirt road, the grandmother suddenly realizes that the house she was thinking of was actually in Tennessee, not Georgia. That shocking realization makes her involuntarily kick her feet which frightens the cat, causing it to spring from its hidden basket, onto Bailey's neck. He then loses control of the car and flips it over to end up in a ditch below the road. Only the children's mother is injured, the children are frantic with excitement, and the grandmother's main concern is dealing with Bailey's anger.

The men shoot Bailey and John in the forest, then come back to take the children's mother, the baby, and June Star for the same purpose. The grandmother begins pleading for her own life. When The Misfit talks to her about Jesus, he expresses his doubts about His raising Lazarus from the dead. As he speaks, the Misfit becomes agitated and angry. He snarls into the grandmother's face and claims that life has "no pleasure but meanness". In her growing confusion, she thinks that The Misfit is going to cry, so she reaches out and touches his shoulder tenderly, saying "You're one of my own children!" His reaction is to jump away "as if a snake had bitten him" and he kills her with three shots.

When they finish murdering the family, The Misfit takes a moment to clean his glasses, saying that the grandmother would have been a good woman if "it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life." The story ends with the Misfit chastising one of his sidekicks for claiming that the family's murder was good fun. The Misfit tells him to shut up, that "it's no real pleasure in life."

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