

A Good Man Is Hard To Find

Adapted by
Thomas F. Rogers

(from the story by Flannery O'Connor)



Salt Lake City

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A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND

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A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND

CAST OF CHARACTERS

4M 3W 1TB 1TG.

THE GRANDMOTHER

JANE STAR -- her juvenile grand-daughter

JOHN WESLEY -- June's juvenile brother

MOTHER -- to Jane and John

BAILEY -- Jane and John's father

MRS. BUTTS -- proprietress of a Lunch Counter

MISFIT -- an escaped convict

BOBBY LEE -- the Misfit's young accomplice

HIRAM -- the Misfit's other young accomplice

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4M 3W 1TB 1TG.

1Interior 1Exterior.

About 30 mins.

A family in the deep south -- mother, father, grandmother, juvenile son and daughter -- take an innocent excursion into the countryside from which none of them is fated to return. Their nemesis is an escaped convict, the Misfit, who, with his two young accomplices, dispatches each of them in turn. The last of his victims, the grandmother, pleads for mercy. As she does so, her own shallowness and hypocrisy come to light. The MISFIT in turn reprimands his accomplices for taking pleasure in the executions. In its enigmatic way, this one act play -- based on Flannery O'Connor's celebrated story of the same name -- raises hard questions about mortality, goodness and Christian salvation.

NOTE (Courtesy of the Author)

As I made my way the other day through "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," after many years away from it, I was fairly devastated. Particularly in the light of the many sociopathic mass killers who have so regularly emerged in just the last few years, it's even more grim than before. It's also marvelously enigmatic -- truly a work of genius and a philosophical gem. Here are some extracts from O'Connor's journal when she was only twenty-one and a student at the Iowa Writers Workshop:

"Freud, Proust, Lawrence have located love inside the human and there is no need to question their location; however, there is no need either to define love as they do -- only as desire, since this precludes Divine love, which, while it too may be desire, is a different kind of desire -- Divine desire -- and is outside of man and capable of lifting him up to itself....The more conscious the desire for God becomes, the more successful union with another becomes because the intelligence realizes the relation in its relation to a greater desire and if this intelligence is in both parties, the motive power in the desire for God becomes double and gains in becoming God-like. The modern man isolated from faith, from raising his desire for God into a conscious desire, is sunk into the position of seeing physical love as an end in itself. Thus his romanticizing it, wallowing in it, and then cynicizing it" (cited in *The New Yorker*, Sep. 16, 2003, pp. 26 -- 30).

This alone foretells what a profound, though sophisticated post-modern religious writer Flannery O'Connor would become.

A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND

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The interior of Red Sammy Butts' filling station and dance hall on a highway south of Atlanta, Georgia. A hot summer day. MRS. BUTTS is wiping down the counter as the FAMILY enters. BAILEY wears a loud yellow shirt patterned with bright blue parrots. The GRANDMOTHER wears a navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a white dot in the print. Her collars and cuffs are white organdy trimmed with lace, and a purple spray of cloth violets containing a sachet is pinned at her neckline. By contrast the children's MOTHER wears slacks and a green kerchief on her head. She carries a very young baby. There are no other customers.

GRANDMOTHER: Wasn't that a cute little pickaninny standing in that shack door 'cross the road?

JUNE STAR: He didn't have any britches on.

GRANDMOTHER: He probably didn't have any. Little niggers in the country don't have things like we do. If I could paint, I'd paint his picture ... Lovely trip so far -- but I still say we shouldn't be going to Florida.

JOHN WESLEY: Why dintcha stay at home then?

JUNE STAR: She wouldn't stay at home to be queen for a day.

MOTHER: Children!

JUNE STAR: She wouldn't stay home for a million bucks. Afraid she'd miss something. She has to go everywhere we go.

GRANDMOTHER: All right, Miss. Just remember that the next time you want me to curl your hair.

MRS. BUTTS: Can I help you folks?

BAILEY: We'll have your barbecued sandwiches.

MRS. BUTTS: For everyone?

(BAILEY nods)

Why don't you all sit at that table over there by the window. You'll be a lot more comfortable. I'll have your sandwiches in just a few minutes.

(They sit at the table)

GRANDMOTHER: Take your time. I ain't in no hurry to get to Florida. Guess you read in the newspaper 'bout this here fellow calls hisself the Misfit -- loose from the Federal Pen and headed toward Florida?

MRS. BUTTS: *(At the grill)* Yes, we read about that.

GRANDMOTHER: And did you read what it says he did to these people? I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that a loose in it. I couldn't answer to my conscience if I did.

MRS. BUTTS: You can't win. You can't win. These days you don't know who to trust. Ain't that the truth?

GRANDMOTHER: People are certainly not like they used to be.

MRS. BUTTS: Two fellers come in here last week, driving a Chrysler. It was a old beat-up car but it was a good one and these boys looked all right to Red Sammy and me. Red Sammy's my husband. Said they worked at the mill, and you know we let them fellers charge the gas they bought? Now why did we do that?

GRANDMOTHER: Because you're good folks.

MRS. BUTTS: Yes'm, I suppose so. By the way, did you folks want somethin' to drink?

BAILEY: We'd like co'-colas.

MRS. BUTTS: Everyone?

BAILEY: That's right.

MRS. BUTTS: Now or with the sandwiches?

BAILEY: Before.

MRS. BUTTS: All right...

(She brings them bottles of Coke and glasses, then uncaps the bottles.)

Still it isn't a soul in God's green world you can trust. And I don't count nobody out of that, not nobody.

Even my Red Sammy. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if that -- what you call him?

GRANDMOTHER: Who?

MRS. BUTTS: That escaped criminal?

GRANDMOTHER: The Misfit!

MRS. BUTTS: Yes, if that Misfit didn't attack this place right here. If he hears about it being here, I wouldn't be surprised to see him. If he hears it's two cent in the cash register, I wouldn't be a-tall surprised.

GRANDMOTHER: You know what I think's to blame?

MRS. BUTTS: What?

GRANDMOTHER: Europe.

MRS. BUTTS: Europe?

GRANDMOTHER: Europe. Europe's to blame for the way things are now. The way Europe acts you would think we were made of money. And you remember those newsreels?

MRS. BUTTS: Newsreels?

GRANDMOTHER: After the war? I saw one once. I can still recall it. And when I do, sometimes I can't even sleep at night. There was a small room -- maybe you remember it -- piled high with bodies of dead, naked people all in a heap, their arms and legs all tangled together ...

MOTHER: Bailey!

BAILEY: Mother! The children!

GRANDMOTHER: A head thrust in here, a head there, a foot, a knee, a part that should have been covered up sticking out...

BAILEY: Mother!

MOTHER: Bailey, give me a dime! June Star, put this dime in that nickelodeon over there so we can hear some pretty music.

(JUNE STAR does so.)

GRANDMOTHER: A hand raised grasping at nothing. Before you knew it was really true, the picture had changed and a voice said, "Time marches on!" Remember? That's the kind of thing that happens every day in Europe, where they ain't so advanced as in this country. And, you know, we let some of them Europeans over here after the war -- what do you call them? Some initial...D --

BAILEY: Displaced Persons.

GRANDMOTHER: That's right. D.P.'s. We have some in Atlanta. And, you know, it's just like rats with fleas that carry typhoid -- they've brought their murderous ways over the water to this place. If they came from where that kind of thing was done to them, who's to say they won't do it to others?

MRS. BUTTS: You're exactly right. They's no use talking about it.

(Meanwhile, JUNE STAR has stepped onto the dance floor and begun a tap routine.)

But ain't she cute? Would you like to come be my girl?

JUNE STAR: No, I certainly wouldn't. I wouldn't live in a broken-down place like this for a million bucks!

MRS. BUTTS: Ain't she cute?

GRANDMOTHER: Aren't you ashamed?

MRS. BUTTS: (*bringing the sandwiches*) Here's your order.

MOTHER: Thank you. June Star, John Wesley. You quit your exploring and come right here this minute.

GRANDMOTHER: You two come sit here by me. If you eat your sandwiches good and keep quiet, I'll tell you a story.

(The children return to the table)

Once when I was a maiden lady, I was courted by a Mr. Edgar Atkins Teagarden from Jasper, Georgia. He was a very good-looking man and a gentleman and brought me a watermelon every Saturday with his initials carved in it -- E.A.T. Well, one Saturday, Mr. Teagarden brought the watermelon and there was nobody home and he left it on the front porch and returned in his buggy to Jasper, but I never got the watermelon because a nigger boy ate it when he saw the initials, E.A.T...

(JOHN WESLEY giggles)

JUNE STAR: Shut up, John Wesley. That wasn't so funny. Besides, I wouldn't marry a man that brought me a watermelon on Saturday.

GRANDMOTHER: You would have done very well to marry Mr. Teagarden as he was a gentleman and also bought him some stock for this here Co'-cola when it first came out, and he died only a few years ago, a very wealthy gentleman.

BAILEY: Eat your sandwich, Ma. The rest of us are ready to move on.

GRANDMOTHER: I'm saving half mine for Petty Sing.

BAILEY: That damn cat.

GRANDMOTHER: I hope she's still sleeping in her basket.

BAILEY: She'd better be.

GRANDMOTHER: I'm keeping her on the back seat. In her basket. Covered over...But I just couldn't leave her alone in the house for three whole days. I'd miss her too much. And she might accidentally brush against one of the gas burners and asphyxiate herself.

BAILEY: I don't relish staying in motels with any cat.

MRS. BUTTS: (*To GRANDMOTHER*) You sure look pretty in that outfit for -- going on a trip, I mean.

GRANDMOTHER: It's mostly in case of an accident. In case anyone sees me dead on the highway, they'll at least know it was a lady.

MRS. BUTTS: Going to Florida for you vacation?

BAILEY: That's right.

GRANDMOTHER: The children have been to Florida before. It's not too late to change your mind. You all ought to take them somewhere else for a change so they would see different parts of the world and be broad. They never have been to east Tennessee.

JOHN WESLEY: Let's go through Georgia fast, Dad, so we don't have to look at it much.

GRANDMOTHER: If I were a little boy I wouldn't talk about my native state that way. Tennessee has the mountains and Georgia has the hills.

JOHN WESLEY: Tennessee is just a hillbilly dumping ground and Georgia is a lousy state too.

JUNE STAR: You said it!!

GRANDMOTHER: In my time children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else. People did right then. Not like now -- with Misfits and all...What will you do, John Wesley, if on our way to Florida this fellow, this Misfit, catches you?

JOHN WESLEY: I'll smack his face.

GRANDMOTHER: Well, if I can't change anybody's mind, there's one place I insist we stop to inspect. It's, as I recollect, on the other side of Toombsboro...

JOHN WESLEY: What is?

GRANDMOTHER: An old plantation I visited once when I was a young lady.

JUNE STAR: We're not interested in when you was a young lady!

GRANDMOTHER: The house had six white columns across the front and there was an avenue of oaks leading up to it and two little wooden trellis arbors on either side in front where you sat down with your suitor after a stroll in the garden.

BAILEY: We can't lose any time looking at an old house.

GRANDMOTHER: Oh, but I do want to see it again -- and find out if the little twin arbors are still standing...
(*Eying the children*)

There was a secret panel in this house, John Wesley, and the story went that all the family silver was hidden in it when Sherman came through but it was never found.

JOHN WESLEY: Hey! Let's go see it! We'll find it! We'll find it! We'll poke all the woodwork and find it! Who lives there? Where do you turn off at? Hey, Pop, can't we go there?

JUNE STAR: We never seen a house with a secret panel! Let's go to the house with the secret panel! Hey, pop, can't we go to see the house with the secret panel?

GRANDMOTHER: It won't be far out of our way, I know. It won't take over twenty minutes.

BAILEY: No!

JUNE STAR: Pop, please let us! Mom, tell Dad --

JOHN WESLEY: We never have any fun, even on our vacation!

JUNE STAR: We never do what *WE* want to! Please, Pop! Please!

BAILEY: All right! Will you shut up?! Will you all just shut up for one second? If you don't shut up, we won't go anywhere.

GRANDMOTHER: It would be very educational for them.

BAILEY: All right. But this is the only time we're going to stop for anything like this. This is the one and only time. Now let's get going. Keep the change.

MRS. BUTTS: Thanks.

(*The FAMILY moves toward the door*)

GRANDMOTHER: I'll know the spot. The dirt road you have to turn down is just around a big bend right after Toombsboro.

BAILEY: Not a *dirt* road!!

GRANDMOTHER: Well, goodbye, now. Thanks for your hospitality. And, Bailey, don't forget the speed limit. Fifty-Five miles an hour.

BAILEY: I know that!

(*The FAMILY leaves*)

MRS. BUTTS: See you all again.

(A car starts up. The lights dim to a blackout. The car motor is still audible)

GRANDMOTHER'S VOICE It has beautiful glass over the front doorway and a candle-lamp in the hall.

JUNE STAR'S VOICE I'll bet that secret panel's in the fireplace.

BAILEY'S VOICE You can't go inside the house. You don't know who lives there.

JOHN WESLEY'S VOICE While you all talk to the people in front I'll run around behind and get in a window.

MOTHER'S VOICE We'll all stay in the car.

(Screeching tires and brakes)

GRANDMOTHER'S VOICE My, that was a curve.

BAILEY'S VOICE I didn't see that wash going up the last hill. Damn dirt road!

GRANDMOTHER'S VOICE Time was when they were no paved roads and thirty miles was a day's journey.

BAILEY'S VOICE This place had better turn up in a minute or I'm going to turn around. I've got more than thirty miles to cover before sunset.

GRANDMOTHER'S VOICE It's not much farther...Oh!

JOHN WESLEY'S VOICE What's the matter, Granny?

GRANDMOTHER'S VOICE I just remembered --

JUNE STAR'S VOICE Whatcha doing, Granny? Watcher feet!

(A cat snarls.)

JOHN WESLEY'S VOICE Petty Sing!

BAILEY'S VOICE Damn cat!

(Tires screech. Then a car is heard turning over. Then silence. Slowly, the lights rise on a hill-surrounded, tree-enclosed glade or meadow. A road appears in the distance. The GRANDMOTHER is sitting on the grass, staring ahead as if in a daze. JUNE STAR and JOHN WESLEY enter on the run.)

FOUR pages left to end