

Summary of "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

Plot Overview

The grandmother tries to convince her son, Bailey, and his wife to take the family to east Tennessee for vacation instead of Florida. She points out an article about the Misfit, an escaped convict heading toward Florida, and adds that the children have already been there. John Wesley, eight years old, suggests that the grandmother stay home, and his sister, June Star, says nastily that his grandmother would never do that.

On the day of the trip, the grandmother hides her cat, Pitty Sing, in a basket in the car. She wears a dress and hat with flowers on it so that people will know she is "a lady" if there's an accident. In the car, John Wesley says he doesn't like Georgia, and the grandmother chastises him for not respecting his home state. When they pass a cotton field, she says there are graves in the middle of it that belonged to the plantation and jokes that the plantation has "Gone with the Wind." Later, she tells a story about an old suitor, Edgar Atkins Teagarden. Edgar brought her a watermelon every week, into which he carved his initials, E. A. T. Once he left it on the porch and a black child ate it because he thought it said *eat*.

The family stops at a restaurant called the Tower, owned by Red Sammy Butts. Red Sammy complains that people are untrustworthy, explaining that he recently let two men buy gasoline on credit. The grandmother tells him he's a good man for doing it. Red Sam's wife says she doesn't trust anyone, including Red Sam. The grandmother asks her if she's heard about the Misfit, and the woman worries that he'll rob them. Red Sam says, "A good man is hard to find." He and the grandmother lament the state of the world.

Back in the car, the grandmother wakes from a nap and realizes that a plantation she once visited is nearby. She says that the house had six white columns and was at the end of an oak tree-lined driveway. She lies that the house had a secret panel to make the house seem more interesting. Excited, the children beg to go to the house until Bailey angrily gives in. The grandmother points him to a dirt road.

The family drives deep into the woods. The grandmother suddenly remembers that the house was in Tennessee, not in Georgia. Horrified at her mistake, she jerks her feet. Pitty Sing escapes from the basket and startles Bailey, who wrecks the car. The children's mother breaks her shoulder, but no one else is hurt. The grandmother decides not to tell Bailey about her mistake.

A passing car stops, and three men get out, carrying guns. The grandmother thinks she recognizes one of them. One of the men, wearing glasses and no shirt, descends into the ditch. He tells the children's mother to make the children sit down because they make him nervous. The grandmother suddenly screams because she realizes that he's the Misfit. The man says it's not good that she recognized him. Bailey curses violently, upsetting the grandmother. The grandmother asks the Misfit whether he'd shoot a lady, and the Misfit says he wouldn't like to. The grandmother claims that she can tell he's a good man and that he comes from "nice people." [The Misfit](#) agrees and praises his parents.

The grandmother continues telling him he's a good man. The Misfit tells the other two men, Hiram and Bobby Lee, to take Bailey and John Wesley into the woods. The grandmother adjusts her hat, but the brim breaks off. The Misfit says he knows he isn't good but that he isn't the worst man either. He apologizes to the grandmother and the children's mother for not wearing a shirt and says that he and the other men had to bury their clothes after they escaped. He says they borrowed the clothes they're wearing from some people they met.

The grandmother asks the Misfit whether he ever prays. Just as he says no, she hears two gunshots. The Misfit says he used to be a gospel singer, and the grandmother chants, "pray, pray." He says he wasn't a bad child but that at one point he went to prison for a crime he can't remember committing. He says a psychiatrist told him he'd killed his father. The grandmother tells the Misfit to pray so that Jesus will help him. The Misfit says he's fine on his own.

Bobby Lee and Hiram come back from the woods, and Bobby Lee gives the Misfit the shirt Bailey had been wearing, but the grandmother doesn't realize it's Bailey's. The Misfit tells the children's mother to take the baby and June Star and go with Bobby Lee and Hiram into the woods. Bobby Lee tries to hold June Star's hand, but she says he looks like a pig.

The grandmother starts chanting, "Jesus, Jesus." The Misfit says he's like Jesus, except Jesus hadn't committed a crime. He says he gave himself this name because his punishment doesn't seem to fit the crime people said he committed. A gunshot comes from the woods. The grandmother begs the Misfit not to shoot a lady. Two more gunshots come from the woods, and the grandmother cries out for Bailey.

The Misfit says that Jesus confused everything by raising the dead. He says that if what Jesus did is true, then everyone must follow him. But if he didn't actually raise the dead, then all anyone can do is enjoy their time on earth by indulging in "meanness." The grandmother agrees that perhaps Jesus didn't raise

the dead. The Misfit says he wishes he had been there so he could know for sure. The grandmother calls the Misfit "one of my own children," and the Misfit shoots her in the chest three times.

Bobby Lee and Hiram return, and they all look at the grandmother. The Misfit observes that the grandmother could have been a good woman if someone had been around "to shoot her every minute of her life." The Misfit says life has no true pleasure.