

A look at the family
setting in the book, a
good man is hard to
find



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The short story “A good man is hard to find” was written by Flannery O’Connor and published in 1955. In this story you have a very dysfunctional family. The members of this family include the grandmother, her son Bailey, an eight year old boy named John Wesley, a little girl named June Star, and the mother of the children, a character that remains nameless throughout the story. The Mother of the children also has a baby.

So what is so dysfunctional about this family, well for starters, let’s look at the children and the “mother of the children.” John Wesley and June Star have the same mother but different last names, and therefore different fathers. The “mother of the children” (O’Conner, 2011, p. 250) is a “young woman” (O’Conner, 2011, p. 250) and is probably very pretty and attractive because she has had no problems finding men who will impregnate her, but the problem is that they do not stay with her afterwards. This makes it easier for the mother and the children to become a dysfunctional family. Bailey’s last name is unknown, but it does not seem to be Wesley or Star. The baby, which remains nameless in the story, is most likely Bailey’s baby, and that is why “the mother of the children” now lives with Bailey, unmarried, hence the title given to her is “mother of the children” (O’Conner, 2011, p. 250), instead of the wife. John Wesley and June Star both know that Bailey is not their real dad, and therefore know that the grandmother is not really their grandmother. This is why the children do not show the grandmother any respect, and ignore her as often as possible.

We first see an example of the boy John Wesley displaying his dysfunctional attitude in paragraph six when he says “I’d smack his face,” (O’Conner, 2011, p. 250) as a reply to the grandmother asking him what would you do if

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this fellow, The Misfit, caught you?" (O'Connor, 2011, p. 250). Obviously he is trying to be a tough kid has many little boys do, but there are plenty of other things he could have said to act tough, that would have been a little more intelligent and a little less dysfunctional as "I'd smack his face" when referring to a known murder and fugitive.

Shortly thereafter in paragraph sixteen of the story, John Wesley says "Tennessee is just a hillbilly dumping ground, and Georgia is a lousy state too." (O'Connor, 2011, p. 251). This sort of disrespectful talk reeks of a dysfunctional attitude. In the very next line June Star replies "You said it" (O'Connor, 2011, p. 251), agreeing with John Wesley's statement showing June Star to be a disrespectful litter girl with a dysfunctional attitude as well.

Now, the grandmother attempts to point out the error of the children's behavior and begins to talk about how people in her day were more respectful, but before she could finish she is distracted by a little boy without pants on the side of the road and says "Little niggers in the country don't have things like we do." (O'Connor, 2011, p. 251) So basically she blurts out something using disrespectful language regarding black people while trying to teach the children to be respectful. This is dysfunctional.

Now everyone is entailed to their opinion about songs, but why would anyone want to dance to a song about losing their boyfriend, that sounds a little bit dysfunctional. But according to the story "The children's mother put a dime in the machine and played "The Tennessee Waltz," and the grandmother said that tune always made her want to dance." (O'Connor, 2011, p. 251) .

Later, right after the accident, June Star said “ But nobody’s killed,” with disappointment as the grandmother limped out of the car.” (O’Conner, 2011, p. 254) To say something like that with disappointment is very mean and dysfunctional.

Finally, even the Misfit, referring to the grandmother, said “ She would of been a good woman, if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life.” (O’Conner, 2011, p. 257) Recognizing that the grandmother only had mean and dysfunctional family members.