

# THE GOOD LORD WILL PROVIDE

*Lawrence Treat and Charles M. Plotz*

STATE PENITENTIARY

April 3

Dear Judy,

It's been a whole year now a whole long year without you. But I been a real good prisoner staying out of trouble like a cat stays away from water. They all say I'll get my parole next April, plenty of time to put in a crop. So hang on, you and Uncle Ike. The only thing bothering me is I ain't heard from you in so long.

Why? What's happening?

Judy, it's not like I done anything wrong. All I did was drive that car. I didn't know they had guns and itchy fingers, I didn't even know them good. They was just a couple of city fellas hanging around a bar and I got chinning with them and happened to let drop I was the champpeen stock car racer of Hadley County. I done a little bragging maybe. I musta told them I could just about drive a car up the side of a wall and down the other side and if they wanted to see how good I was, why come on out and look. Which they did.

Maybe I was a little stupid but when they allowed they'd pay me right then and there to take them to the bank next day and then on out to the back hills where there was no roads, which they said they wanted to do just for the heck of it—well all I did was ask how much. And when they told me I plumb near keeled over. Because it was almost as much as we needed for that mortgage payment. I figured money was money and if they was taking a lot of it out of the bank, why wouldn't they be generous? What I didn't know was they didn't have no account there.

So I reckon I was real stupid. But stupid or not I sure was lucky because if I'd stayed with that pair much longer I'da got killed too. But they paid me to get them out of town and up into the hills and after I done that I took off and come straight back to you.

When Ike heard the news on the radio he knowed right off it was me at the wheel of the car. Nobody else could have outdrove and outsmarted the cops and I bet I could have got clear off to Mexico or maybe China if I'da wanted to. And if the airplanes hadn't spotted me like they did that pair. But I done what I was paid for, so I come back where I belonged. And if they took fifty thousand

like the papers said or a million I wouldn't know. I was waiting out in the car and all the money I ever seen was what I give you. And like I said, I got it the day before and it wasn't stolen from the bank. Not that bank anyhow.

The sheriff kept asking me where the stolen money was. After all the two bank robbers was dead with no trace of the money and all the sheriff had was me. Just a poor dumb farmer with a knack for handling a car.

But I don't want to worry you with all this. I'm real lonesome for you like I said. So when are you coming up here to visit me? And how are you and how's Ike and the farm?

Your loving husband  
Walt

R.F.D. 2, Hadley

April 10

Dear Walt,

I got your letter and the reason I ain't come to see you is that I just don't have the money for the trip. Besides I got to do all the chores now. Uncle Ike's down with the rhumatiz again and Doc Saunders says he won't be up and around until the warm spring weather sets in and that's not liable to happen until May. And when Ike's feeling puny he wants me around all the time and all he does is complain and tell me everybody's out to take the skin off me. He even tried to chase George off the place when George come around in his new car to ask me out for a ride. And I sure needed to get away from the farm for awhile.

George was real nice to me too. He wanted to know how I was getting along without you and if I missed you much. Well I said it was kind of lonesome. Who was around except Ike? And I told him right out that we was liable to lose the farm unless we got that mortgage installment paid and how could I pay it until I got a crop in? And I said that what with George getting promoted to be vice president of the bank he could maybe do something. He said he'd see what he could manage and that was about as far as we got. Anyhow it was nice getting away from Ike for awhile, specially when George took me to dinner at that new place in town.

Walt, I wish you was a banker too.

Your loving wife  
Judy

STATE PENITENTIARY

April 15

Dear Judy,

I know it's hard on you with Ike to take care of it's even worse. He's tetchy enough when he feels good but when he's got the aches he's enough to try the patience of a saint. But the good Lord will provide, Judy, and I know what I'm saying.

18

About George and the bank holding off—you want to get it writ down. So next time you see him you want to ask him about Ruthie Watkins which I found out about from a guy up here named Ernie Taylor. Ernie, his business is selling letters. And like he says, if I got a cow or a bushel of wheat I can sell them, can't I? So why can't he sell letters?

Ernie and me get along fine because the both of us we're innocent men and we shouldn't ought to be here. But as long as we are we talk about things and Ernie happened to mention some letters he got hold of which George writ to this Ruthie Watkins. So maybe you better mention them to George next time you see him.

Your loving husband  
Walt

April 22

Dear Walt,

George took me out to dinner again and we talked about a lot of things. And like you told me to I just happened to mention Ruthie Watkins and then I said about the mortgage and how it ought to be writ down. And the very next day I got a letter from the bank promising to hold off until autumn but I don't know what good it's going to do. Because next time I was out with George, Ike got hold of some of that white mule stuff and after that he got the idea he ought to go riding in the tractor. Which he did, as far as that big ditch on the west side. Ike didn't get hurt bad, just a bruise or two that he's relaxing from, but you ought to see what's left of that tractor. So how do I make that mortgage payment in the fall with no crop coming in? And if I don't pay up we got no farm.

I'm tired, Walt. I'm plumb tired and just about at the end of my tether. You said the good Lord will provide—but how? How?

Your loving wife  
Judy

STATE PENITENTIARY

April 28

Dear Judy,

You got to be patient like I said and if you're real patient the Lord will provide. Because He come to me in a dream and He said that there was something buried in the south field that would take care of us. So you tell Ike to get over that rhumatiz of his. Tell him I got only a year to go and then I'm going to dig up that something in the south field and after that everything's going to be all right.

Your loving husband  
Walt

19

R.F.D. 2, Hadley

May 4

Dear Walt,

I don't know just how to tell you this but I guess I'll just set it down the way it happened.

You know how Ike hates the law ever since they come around and took you away. So when the sheriff and six deputies showed up the day before yesterday Ike tried to chase them away. He got up out of bed and ran all over the place looking for his shotgun, only I had it hid. Then he yelled at them and called them all kinds of names and they finally grabbed him and tied him up for a spell, so he never did see what they done. He's spy again, all that running after the deputies loosened him up and now he's as good as ever. But I don't rightly know what the sheriff come for and you'll never tumble to what those deputies of his done.

Walt, they went down to that south field and the six of them spent the whole day digging and then they come back the next day and kept on until they dug up just about every inch of that field. And I never did see any six men look so tired and they sure was mad. I asked them lots of questions and one of them—I think he come all the way down from the prison—he allowed as how all your mail gets read. Walter, what did he say that for?

Your loving wife  
Judy

STATE PENITENTIARY

May 7

Dear Judy,

Now plant.

Your loving husband  
Walt

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#### I. UNDERSTANDING THE STORY

1. How many narrators are there in the story?
2. What is Judy's real reason for going out with George?
3. Walt says: "Ernie, his business is selling letters." How can the letters have any importance to George?
4. What helped George decide to extend the mortgage on Walt's farm?
5. How does Ike add to the difficulty of the mortgage situation?
6. Is Walt really "a poor, dumb farmer" as he says? How is it an ironic statement?

7. What inferences can you make about Walt and the stolen money? Does he have it? Does he know where it is?
8. When you read "there was something buried in the south field," what did you infer as the reason Walt mentions it? Did you see any clues for the real reason?
9. What are the ironic situations in the story?

#### II. APPRECIATING THE STORY

1. In what way is the use of narrators a clever way to tell the story? What are other possible approaches?
2. How does the use of incorrect grammar add to the effectiveness of the story?
3. Is Ike really necessary to the story?
4. To what extent does the story illustrate that husbands and wives sometimes develop a "silent" communication between them?
5. What opinion did you form of George?

#### III. WORD STUDY: Examine the following examples of non-standard English found in the story and then add others that you can find.

1. I been a real good prisoner  
*have been*
2. I ain't heard from you in so long.  
*haven't heard*
3. like I done anything wrong  
*have done*
4. They was just a couple of city fellas  
*were fellows*
5. I done a little bragging maybe.  
*did*

#### IV. VOCABULARY ENRICHMENT: Colloquial Expressions and Idioms.

Study the expressions with their definitions and then practice them in the exercise that follows.

1. hang on—continue steadily in doing something hard; persevere
2. go chinning—started talking
3. let drop—let it be known; say
4. they allowed—they said
5. do just for the heck of it—do simply to be doing it
6. I plumb near keeled over—I almost fainted; fell over
7. I reckon—I believe; think
8. I'da got (killed)—I would have been (killed)
9. I bet—I think
10. clear off—as far away as
11. feeling puny—feeling sick or weak
12. take the skin off—take advantage of