

Don't Call Me Good Boy!

Theodore K Phelps, Oct 2025

The boss came out of the house, and his dog came out of hers, a little hut thing where she huddled even in the winter. It wasn't that cold yet, no snow yet, but the leaves were down. Her chunk of meat-on-bone had held her happy through the night. Front paws forward, back arching a Good Morning stretch, she barked and ran to him and sniffed the guns and circled the ATV whining. Boss put the guns in the bag and tied a long, webbed rope to the back of the machine and took a long five minutes fighting to tie the other end to her collar. The idiot had just turned sixteen. His much-older brother opened the screen door and shouted,—*No need for a rope. Dum Fuck. Let her just run free. Fuck!* But the long-legged, no-beard-yet boy flipped a finger and hopped on the ATV. —*Let's go, Good Boy*, saying 'Boy' just to piss off his brother and maybe also because a man doesn't hunt with no girl.

The family came out on long escapes from Toronto, to be off the grid in the Canadian wilderness, hunting game and fishing the plentiful walleye from the wild Albany River, some hundred miles west of the Hudson Bay. It was 2032.

The ATV, a 2015 Can-Am Outlander the dad had picked up from an American tourist years ago, lurched forward to make the dog leash go tight against her neck, then slowed and the boy looked back to see if his girl was running nicely with the ropes, her limping from the summer wounds now gone. Then the three of them, boy, machine, and dog, left the clearing by the northern path to the river. She ran along behind, keeping an eye on the long rope, staying close enough to keep it slack but not too slack or it will catch on rocks or roots and she will go down even as the machine rips whatever from the ground. She knows this from last summer when she fell that way and Boss had to tie her to the rack and take her home, hunting interrupted.

Dog kept up behind her Boss as he threaded his way to the river. Then he was standing and speeding up dodging rocks and gaps. He shouted as if chasing a thief. He never looked back at his long-suffering now-limping friend. He never felt the sudden yank on the rope when she broke her legs and then the pulsing drag on the Outlander's old motor. Never felt that drag release as the rope went loose from her neck. Never knew the dog he'd been given on his twelfth birthday and who walked him to school against the rules of the city, had fallen from exhaustion a mile back and had broken in two, her head tossed to the east and body to the west far into the brush.

Testosterone, they call it. *Peccata mundi*.

He braked hard at the river's edge. —*Let's get some walleye, Good Boy!* Looked back. The rope dragged loose, like a kite's tail. —*How the fuck did you get loose?! Good Boy...Good Boy. Fuck!*

The hunter became a boy again when he got home. Her doghouse empty. Next day, nothing. The lies for his brothers and dad. Walked the trail for hours calling for her, never found the body parts, never thought, even once, I must have killed her.

Forgot her.

Until one day some five years later.

He was up on the Albany River again, this time on guerrilla missions for the Canadian Resistance. On a silent new electric ATV, Chinese issue. He had a company scout dog on the back rack. Nearing the field where he had killed his Good Boy, his eyes went wet. Blurred. He heard her whine coming from the river's edge. The scout dog jumped off. Something pulled the throttle lurching him forward through brush. His eye went cloudy as if a fog entered his helmet. A pair of red dog eyes and bared white teeth looked at him through that fog—or were they *made* of fog? A floating dog head. Then it said —*Let's get some walleye, Boss*, and the ATV raced hard into the raging Albany. The rider tumbled in the current for a mile, breaking all his bones, him surviving, and the dog head flowing with him.

But when his own head finally broke free of the chest, it hit a man fly fishing in the stream. That man was ruined in the mind for the rest of his life because a cloud figure of a galloping hound came up from the river bellowing as if to warn all the shameful world, *Don't call me Good Boy!*

For IWOW Oct 7, 2025, theme "Falling"