FLASH FICTION

Good Girl

by Helia S. Rethmann



"About the Very Vulnerable and Tailed in the Hour of War" by Xisha Angelova

Tint Journal, no. (), www.tintjournal.com

Copyright © 2026 by Tint - ESL Literary Journal and Association.

I doze through the morning commotion, drifting in and out of dreams directed by pain. I only get up when the agony of having to move my limbs is outweighed by the burning in my throat. I need a drink of water.

The tall one, Bev, who used to kiss me good-bye on my nose, has already left, and the small one, Casey, greets me, which she hasn't done in a while. *Hello, sweet girl,* she says, love in her voice. She doesn't sigh when the water I lap up spills over the bowl and puddles on the floorboards. She gets a towel and wipes it up. When I lie back down she pets my head and calls me *a good girl.* She hasn't done this in a while, either. My coat is covered in sores where the fur has come out in patches, and it smells. My once bushy tail is bald and thin like a rat's. Bev no longer wants me to ride in her truck, not even with all the windows down, and Casey sprays chemicals on my bed.

Not today, though. Today, Casey kneels next to me and keeps petting my bumpy, smelly head. *Good girl,* she murmurs, and when the puppy runs into the room, she shoos him out. The puppy looks confused; he is used to being their favorite. Untrained creature that he is, he scratches the other side of the door and barks. Casey ignores him. Ignoring the puppy is hard. He barks and he scratches. His manners are terrible. He pees in the shower! And Bev and Casey laugh.

They don't laugh about my accidents. I'm old enough to know better. It's humiliating to lose control of one's bowels or bladder. It's like they are no longer a part of me, they do what they want, when they want. Most of the time, I don't even notice, with the front of me being disconnected from the hind part. I hate to make Casey sigh and clean up after me.

She doesn't sigh today, though. When she leads me outside to do my thing and stuff falls out while I'm still crossing the living room carpet, Casey gets the paper towels as if it were nothing. Then she gives me medicine covered in hotdogs, but instead of one hotdog, she feeds me five. Five hotdogs, four without any medicine at all!

We go for a ride in her car. She helps me get settled in the backseat. It's been a long time since we've ridden together. We used to go all the time: to the woods, to the lake. To the doctor, of course.

Today, we are going to the doctor. I don't much like going there, but it's good to get out of the house, and I am relieved I won't be expected to walk far. Bev is already there and helps Casey lift me out of the car. Why is Bev here? She smells strange, a sad smell, and I notice that Casey has that smell, too. The doctor smells like the doctor, the exam room smells like it usually smells. There is a heavy blanket on the floor.

Here, girl, Bev says, *lie down on this blanket.* I lie down on the blanket.

Copyright © 2026 by Tint - ESL Literary Journal and Association.

I am a good girl and they tell me so.

Good girl, what a good girl, they say, and they pet me; all of us smelling sad.

Copyright © 2026 by Tint - ESL Literary Journal and Association.