

# THE GOOD GIRL DETOX

Milania Cobelli



**Notes on Identity,  
Approval-Seeking, Burnout,  
and the Courage  
to Choose Yourself**



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Milania is a registered nurse in Ontario, Canada with a background in public health and health promotion. After years of striving, achieving, and living by others' expectations, she began questioning the cost of being a "Good Girl."

The Good Girl Detox weaves personal experience with psychological insight to help women understand why approval-seeking and burnout develop — and how to begin returning to a life that feels aligned, sustainable, and truly their own.

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# INTRODUCING THE “GOOD GIRL”

This book is for women who suspect they may have grown up a “Good Girl.”

The kind of woman who learned early to be agreeable, responsible, and impressive — and now finds herself struggling with identity, chronically seeking approval, and feeling burned out by a life that doesn’t quite fit.

In these pages, I share my story — not because it’s universal, but because it’s a doorway. If parts of it resonate, you’re not alone. And if other parts don’t, that matters too.

The Good Girl doesn’t look the same in every woman.

Alongside my personal narrative, I unpack the neuropsychology behind the Good Girl pattern — Why so many capable, intelligent women end up disconnected from themselves, why approval feels like safety, and why misalignment eventually shows up as exhaustion, anxiety, or collapse.

This is not about blame.  
It’s not about labeling yourself as broken.

And it’s not about becoming someone new.

It’s about becoming yourself.

This book is about self-awareness — understanding why you are the way you are, recognizing that it was adaptive once, and realizing that it is not your fault.

And from that understanding, something else becomes possible.

Starting here, we begin the shift —

from living for approval  
to living in alignment,

from Good Girl  
to Sovereign Woman.

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# CHAPTER 1

## THE MAKING OF A "GOOD GIRL"

# PART A: HOW I LEARNED TO BE A “GOOD GIRL”

## **Good Girls aren’t born; we’re shaped.**

Sculpted by tone, tension, praise, and the quiet ways love was earned in our early environments.

We learn the role instinctively, long before we have words for any of it — by reading the emotional weather of our homes and adapting ourselves to survive it.

Not because someone sat us down and said, “Here’s how to be a good daughter,” but because our bodies registered which versions of us created calm—and which ones created chaos.

I wasn’t born a good girl. I trained for it—like the Olympics, but with more emotional landmines and far fewer medals.

I remember being told to “be good.”  
Harmless parenting technique, I suppose.

But I also remember learning that the alternative was... unsafe.

Not, “I think something terrible will happen” unsafe.  
More like: “If I’m not good, I will never feel peace in this house.”

But the truth is simple:

I grew up in a home where being good wasn't all about *morality*. It was about **stability**.

It meant scanning for tension before entering a room.

It meant anticipating reactions.

It meant shrinking just enough that I didn't accidentally trigger the wrong version of someone.

### **Learning Myself Through Everyone Else First**

My household rewarded obedience, good grades, and emotional containment.

Anger wasn't forbidden—but it was dangerous, because in my home, anger was gasoline.

Any spark could ignite something. Sadness was tolerated, but only if it stayed quiet around my parents' bad moods.

Expressing needs felt terrifying, like a gamble I almost never won.

My dad was loud and unpredictable—big energy, big reactions, big expectations of how daughters “should” be. I never knew which version I'd get, which meant I spent most of my childhood managing him without anyone ever asking me to.

My mom was loving and warm in the ways she could be, but stretched thin and constantly challenged by her own life: her demanding job, being the sole caretaker of 3 kids,

and a volatile marriage that was breaking her long before I entered kindergarten.

In that environment, I learned emotional shape-shifting. I learned how to avoid conflict like my life depended on it—because, emotionally speaking, it sort of did.

And when you're a sensitive, perceptive, internalizing child in a house like that, you don't just become easy.

You become invisible.

### **The Invisible Middle Child**

Being the middle child is a very specific type of anthropology experiment.

You're not the eldest with the expectations and long-awaited milestone celebrations, and you're not the youngest with the spotlight.

You are the bridge, the buffer, the filler episode between two main characters.

My older sister got the attention—good and bad. My younger brother got praise simply for existing (as the youngest and only son in an Italian family, this came with built-in bonus points).

My family would probably say I wasn't "easy" to begin with—that I was "too sensitive" or had tantrums as a child.

I was ridiculed for being too emotional "when I didn't get my way," except... when did I ever get my way?

But the message was clear: “It is what it is, you get what you get. Don’t protest.”

Which is fine, if the child never internalizes that her wants and needs don’t matter.

But I did.

And I got... well, I got very good at not being the problem.

I kept my room tidy.  
I avoided getting in trouble.  
I asked for nothing.

What no one realized is that being “easy” wasn’t my personality.

It was my strategy.

### **School: The First Stage I Performed On**

The thing about being invisible at home is that you start looking for places where you can earn a little visibility—safely.

And school became that for me.

Good grades were my ticket to positive attention.  
Achievement was my love language.  
Praise was my version of affection.

I learned quickly that being smart, responsible, capable, and well-behaved made adults smile at me. So I doubled down.

Became the good student.  
The teacher's pet.  
The overachiever.

The girl who tried hard at everything—sports, the arts, assignments, and group projects.

At one time, I was even doing musicals on the big stage at the community theatre — something I was genuinely proud of.

But the first time I tried to lead something creatively — a group skit, based on my vision (the other group members didn't have any ideas) — a teacher called me a Prima Donna and yelled at me in front of my peers at recess.

I was ten. And I never even really understood what I was getting yelled at for. Being myself? Being someone who enjoyed directing skits and songs? I was not, and have never been, smug.

Ten years old, and I internalized that stepping one inch out of "Good Girl" territory — using my voice, trusting my vision, taking up space — would get me emotionally slapped back into place.

I developed stage fright, didn't try out for another community play, and quietly never stepped into the spotlight again.

**That's how early women learn to shrink.**

## Healing Mantras

“My parents were shaped by their circumstances, their conditioning, and their generation — and I can honor that without carrying it forward.”

“Compassion does not mean continuation.”

“What shaped me was not my fault — and it does not have to shape my future.”

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## PART B: THE MIND OF A GOOD GIRL GROWING UP

If you look at it through a trauma-informed lens, this is exactly how Good Girl conditioning is formed: not through dramatic, cinematic events, but through the small, repeated experiences that teach a child which parts of herself are acceptable—and which parts must be muted to keep the peace.

Sensitive, perceptive children—kids who feel the emotional temperature of a room before they feel their own heartbeat—are the most vulnerable to this conditioning. Because we don't just learn the rules; we absorb them into our nervous systems.

We learn to fawn, overachieve, avoid conflict, and suppress needs long before we know we're doing it.

And parents with their own stress, trauma, mental health issues, or inconsistent emotional presence unintentionally shape us in this direction—not because they want compliant children, but because they don't have the capacity for anything else.

The result?

A child who becomes hyper-attuned to mood shifts.

A girl who becomes allergic to disappointment.

A budding perfectionist who believes that mistakes equal danger – and grows into a woman who doesn't just try to be good—she tries to be perfect.

There are a few common elements in childhood that create Good Girls. Most women will recognize themselves in at least one.

## **1. Temperament: Sensitive, Perceptive Children**

Some kids are born tuned in.  
They feel tension.  
They anticipate reactions.  
They adapt quickly to keep the peace.

These children are wired for connection—and wired to detect threat in emotional tone.

They are usually more sensitive to noise, light, emotions, crowds - and especially chaos.

They don't choose to be good.  
Their nervous systems compel them to be.

## **2. Parenting Styles That Shape Good Girls**

It doesn't require abusive parents. It only requires parents who:

- were stressed
- were inconsistent
- had untreated mental health issues
- praised achievement more than authenticity
- expected obedience
- (unconsciously) suppressed emotional expression
- relied on the child(ren) to stabilize the home
- avoided conflict, leaving the child to carry the emotional load

Even loving parents can unintentionally create Good Girls if their own wounds leave little room for their child's full emotional self.

### **3. Adverse Childhood Events (ACES) & Emotional Micro-Injuries**

Good Girls are often shaped by:

- volatile arguments
- unpredictable moods
- emotional dismissal
- being called “too sensitive”
- being called “too much”
- sibling comparison
- feeling responsible for a parent's happiness
- needing to be mature too early
- quiet emotional neglect
- conditional affection

These micro-injuries teach a child: *“To stay safe, I must be good.”*

### **4. School Reinforces the Role**

School rewards compliance, achievement, emotional containment, being quiet, being helpful.

Sensitive girls learn quickly that:

- praise = love
- effort = belonging
- perfection = worthiness
- visibility = risk

They excel. They impress.  
They perform their way into approval.

And they lose small pieces of themselves along the way.

## 5. Sibling Roles Cement the Pattern

Whether you're the eldest, middle, youngest, golden child, scapegoat, or the invisible one, your role becomes part of your identity.

It's not, "Who am I?"

It becomes, "What version of me keeps this family stable?"

This is how a girl becomes good.

Not joyful.

Not expressive.

Not curious.

Not brave.

Just...good.

And good becomes a shield, a costume, a survival strategy — one she will carry straight into adolescence, dating, work, marriage, and motherhood.

Good Girl conditioning is not about politeness.

It's about protection.

Protection from conflict.

Protection from rejection.

Protection from the emotional fallout of other people's instability.

I didn't know it then, but I was learning the foundational belief many Good Girls carry into adulthood:

*"If I'm good, things will stay calm.*

*If I'm good, people will like me.*

*If I'm good, I'll be safe."*

**And for a child, safety isn't optional — it's everything.**



# CHAPTER 2

## THE “GOOD GIRL” IN THE WILD

# PART A: THE YEARS I WENT LOOKING FOR LOVE, FREEDOM & MYSELF

If Chapter One was about the girl I learned to become, then Chapter Two is about the young woman I tried to outrun her with.

There's a particular kind of chaos that happened when this Good Girl left home for the first time.

She's technically free, but emotionally she's still carrying her mother's stress, her father's volatility her childhood silence, and the belief that if she can just be lovable enough, the world will finally choose her back.

I arrived at Western University with all of that neatly tucked into my dorm-sized backpack — and within a week, I met the boy who would detonate it.

## **The First Time I Was Chosen (My First Real Love)**

His name was Mark.\*

Even now, if I say or read his name, my stomach does this old familiar gut-punch feeling — the one you get when you know you've lost the love of your life for good.

He lived on my dorm floor, which was already a violation of the sacred “floorcest” rule, but I was 18 and rules were

*\*Some names have been changed out of respect for privacy and confidentiality.*

for people with less chemistry.

We clicked magically, and instantly.

Same music-soul connection.

Same humour.

Same “obsessed-but-somehow-still-healthy” energy.

He was honestly the coolest, most down-to-earth guy I’d ever met — the epitome of a best-friend and lover.

More than that, he was the first person who ever made me feel deeply seen and loved my personality — not just as the Good Girl who got good grades and kept the peace, but as the version of myself I hadn’t even met yet.

With him I felt free, bold, magnetic, and alive. He woke up parts of me I didn’t know existed — sexually, emotionally, creatively, spiritually.

Our relationship, in the beginning, was a live movie-montage of first love. And like every good movie, it had an inevitable plot twist. Just... not the happy-ending kind.

### **Where It Broke**

When we fought, I fought like a girl who grew up watching love go up in flames — loud, emotional, too intense, terrified of losing him.

He fought like someone who had never once witnessed emotional chaos.

You can imagine how well that went.

Then, I cheated.

It was spring break.

Alcohol was involved.

I had an amazing boyfriend and definitely wasn’t looking (and you *know* how *that* goes).

But a cute boy was showing interest and giving me attention.

And so the Good Girl in me went silent while the once-invisible girl took the wheel.

For my ladies in the grey area: no, I didn't "fully" cheat — but it progressed far enough to break trust, and I told him as soon as I came home. Partly from guilt. Partly because I knew he deserved much better than me.

He stayed for a while, but the trust didn't - and nothing we did after could resurrect that.

Eventually, he pulled away.

And I kept trying to fight for him in my de-lu-lu, dramatic, tear-soaked, "this must be destiny" kind of way.

Then, I learned the kind of heartbreak that rearranges a person permanently.

The belief it left me with was simple:

*"Love like that won't happen again, especially for someone like me."*

Hold onto that. It becomes the through-line of the next decade.

## **The Great Depression: Ages 19–22**

There was a clear before and after in my life:

**Life before Mark.**

**Life after Mark.**

Everything after felt like trying to fill that emotional crater with emotional quicksand. In other words, I had zero coping skills.

Around Christmas of my second year, I came undone.

I started drinking more.

Lost my spark.

Skipped class.

Stopped performing academically.

Used sex, drugs, and a “party-girl” persona as anesthesia.

And fell into a depression that made me unrecognizable to myself.

I failed a nursing course in that second year (the Good Girl’s equivalent of a public flogging).

This was the era when my mom stopped recognizing me — especially as the “Good Girl” she’d always known how to love. The mask slipped so far off my face that our relationship strained under the weight of who I had become.

I could feel myself becoming a disturbance — a liability to the fragile calm she was trying to hold together at home. One day, in the middle of yet another emotional spiral she didn’t understand, she snapped: *“Just get over it!”*

And it landed the same way it always had:

I was too much.

My pain and emotions were too much.

And the only way to be accepted again was to find my Good Girl identity and put it back on.

### **Dating in My 20s: The Pattern I Couldn't See**

By my final year of university, I was on antidepressants, cut down on partying, and started walking around with my head down like a chastened Hogwarts student.

My confidence was nonexistent, but I was trying to

rebuild something that *resembled* stability.

So, I put the Good Girl persona back on — not because it fit, but because it kept the peace at home and made me easier for everyone else.

It became the version I brought into dating, into work, into every space I entered. My career — which would later become its own roller coaster — began and ended with that same mask. (More on that later).

With dating, I kept chasing versions of Mark — not the person, but the feeling:

The intensity.

The spark.

The aliveness.

The validation that I was worthy of being chosen.

But that's not how adult dating works.

I attracted — and chose — men who were:

- emotionally unavailable
- chaotic
- confusing
- avoidant
- or simply incapable of loving anyone

And in between those?

The good ones.

The safe ones.

The men who might have actually loved me.

I pushed every single one away.

Why?

Because I didn't want safe.

I wanted that thrilling, hopeless, movie-montage love.

And in dating, that combination is a tragedy waiting to happen.

## Healing Mantras

“I was not reckless — I was adaptive, responding with the only tools I had.”

“What I mistook for love was my nervous system looking for familiarity.”

“Nothing I lived through was wasted — it was information.”

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## **The Good Girl Abroad: My Fantasy Self**

Travel became my escape portal — the place where I could outrun my grief and try on a different version of myself.

### ***Euro-Trip (22 years old)***

In London, I met Chris — a hot Scottish man who felt handcrafted by the universe to be the next romantic protagonist of my life. Ultra-smart, fun, cool, and a music producer, he made me imagine a completely different kind of life.

We had a transcendent night that felt like the closest thing to Mark-level magic I'd ever recreated.

The romance ended when the trip did, but we stayed connected online, quietly building up a fantasy and setting the stage for a reunion that I hoped for years would surely end in something that “stuck.”

### ***Fiji, New Zealand, and Thailand (26 years old)***

As a side note, I invited Chris — who was living in Bali at the time — to meet me in Fiji. He genuinely wanted to come but couldn't make it, and somehow that only deepened the “unfinished story” energy between us.

But Fiji didn't leave me disappointed for long (and after all, it was FIJI! Love me some snorkeling off a catamaran under the influence of Cava and Champagne 😊).

In New Zealand, I met Nick - a cute, sweet, brilliant 21-year-old Englishman who was disarmingly into me. Our trip together was just seven days, but in that short time we connected deeply through long, stimulating conversations (no kissing, no sex, just pure emotional intimacy). He had that best-friend energy you don't stumble upon often.

I was attracted to him too — kind of an Ed Sheeran type — but his age made me hesitate.

I mean, we all know who *I* was at 21, struggling in school and trying to recover from heart break and too much partying. I figured he still had a lot of living to do.

Four months after we met, he visited me in Canada and then flew me to Disney World for four nights — hotel, parks, magic, all of it. It was the BEST time of my life, and I felt alive.

But I kept thinking, *“he’s too young.”*

Really, I meant: *“He’s too available.”*

Too safe.

Too willing to love me.

I couldn’t meet him where he was.

But he stayed in my life as an online friend for years after, anyway — the kind of person who deserved better than the version of me he met.

As soon as I got to Thailand, I met Collin — a Canadian guy traveling with his equally hot brother. They literally ran up to me on the beach that first day.

Being approached and flirted with by attractive men was like a moth to a flame for this Good Girl. Instantly chosen. Instantly hooked.

Collin was also much less confusing than Nick. He was mainstream hot, fit, fun, and charismatic in all the ways a travel boyfriend is supposed to be. Easy. Obvious. No decoding required.

We had an electric couple of weeks — beaches, parties, hot sex, and ping-pong shows (for the record: strictly for the shock value, not the awe).

My desperate, slightly de-lu-lu self became convinced we could “make it work” once we got back to Canada.

I mean... why not try to continue something this good back home? Never mind that we lived eight hours apart.

On our last night together — Full Moon Party night — we were on a beach that was semi-private, semi-public. He was prolonging sex so I could “get mine.” I wasn’t close.

I started getting paranoid about getting caught. And honestly? Beach sex is wildly overrated anyway. Sand everywhere. The awkward height of the loungers. Meh.

So I confessed mid-act, something like:

*“Let’s stop — it’s okay. I’ve been too drunk to get there most nights anyway...”*

When he questioned that, I admitted I’d kind of been... faking it.

The sex was good — or at least I thought it was. I couldn’t figure out why I wasn’t getting there. Likely it was the alcohol (we were rarely sober).

But looking back, just maybe, it wasn’t actually that good in practice. Maybe it just felt good to be chosen again.

To be wanted. To be living out a dream trip in Thailand — all of which made me feel alive, whether the connection itself was real or not.

Either way, I don’t know what possessed me. The phrase *“I’m faking it”* is the biggest (emotional and physical) boner-killer of all time.

Did I tell him because I thought he deserved honesty?  
Out of guilt because I liked him?  
Was it the Full Moon Party booze (likely with hallucinogens mixed in)?  
Fear of getting caught in public (totally not my style)?

Whatever it was, it was not my brightest moment.

I tried to backpedal —  
“It’s cause I’m drunk!”  
“It’s me, not you!”  
“It’s still been super fun!”

But the damage was done. It got super awkward.

The fling ended the next day, as quickly as it started. He never even added me on Facebook when we parted (so much for our hypothetical future).

But at least it makes an excellent chapter anecdote.

### **The Good Girl Abroad**

I wasn’t the true me.

I thought it was, but, in fact it was the *unburdened* me — the fantasy version:

Magnetic.  
Spontaneous.  
Uninhibited.  
Cool girl energy all day long.

But underneath?

I was still longing.  
Still empty.

Still believing that a love like Mark’s was a one-time miracle.

## ✿ Dating Unsuccessfully on Repeat = Exhaustion

By my early 30s, I was drained.  
Romantically, spiritually, emotionally.

I had been:

- chosen by the wrong men
- unexcited by good, decent men
- overlooked by nearly all the ones I “wanted”
- hopeful, then heartbroken
- disillusioned by my longing
- ghosted — twice, the real confusing kind. The kind where he disappears after an awesome night together (with pretty hot sex I’d say) into already month of dating.

And still clinging to the idea that love was supposed to feel like a roller coaster.

After eight med-free years, I was back on antidepressants again.

I was 32, and I had just been ghosted by a fun, charismatic 40-year-old I imagined a future with.

Looking back: he didn’t want to grow up.  
And he sensed my longing like blood in the water.

I wasn’t his dream girl.  
And he was never going to be what I wanted him to be.

But at the time, losing him felt like another cosmic confirmation that I was unlovable.

## **My Final First Date (to current date)**

When I met Craig\*, I was in a state of emotional hunger that makes almost anything look like a lifeline.

He was the first man who didn't run.  
Didn't ghost.  
Didn't disappear when I pushed.

He pursued.  
He stayed.  
He chose me.

And after years of feeling unchosen, that felt like salvation.

But here's the truth I didn't know yet:

Being chosen is not the same as being with the one you would choose.

Consistency is not compatibility.

And familiarity (especially the childhood-pattern kind) is not safety.

Craig represented exasperation disguised as love — and the Good Girl in me grabbed onto it with both hands.

## PART B: THE MIND OF A GOOD GIRL IN LIFE & LOVE

If my childhood taught me to be “good,” my twenties taught me what happens when “being good” becomes the only life strategy I know.

On the surface, this chapter of my life looks like heartbreak, travel, messy dating, and a rotating cast of men with accents.

But underneath it all was something more universal — something nearly every woman who grew up as a Good Girl eventually faces:

***What do you become when the world outside your childhood home stops rewarding you for being small, pleasing, or perfect?***

For a lot of women, the twenties are marketed as the years you “find yourself.”

But for Good Girls, they’re usually the years you lose yourself again and again trying to love, perform, heal, and prove your worth to people who were never capable of holding it.

**If childhood is where we learn to be good, our twenties are where we learn that our desire to be “good” costs us.**

And no matter how different our stories look on paper — different cities, different men, different heartbreaks — the emotional script is almost identical.

Because the Good Girl follows you.

Into every relationship.

Every breakup.

Every plane ride.

Every late-night text.

Every “almost” love

and every three-day situationship you swear was a soulmate moment.

Here’s the truth most women don’t realize until they’re standing in the rubble of a decade of lessons:

**In your teens, being a Good Girl gets you praise.  
In your twenties, it gets you patterns.**

Patterns that look like:

- falling for the emotionally unavailable
- confusing intensity for intimacy
- performing confidence while secretly starving for connection
- avoiding stable, healthy love because it feels foreign
- longing so deeply it becomes the scent men pick up on
- building fantasy lives with people who couldn’t meet you in reality
- chasing validation as a substitute for self-worth
- becoming the “Cool Girl” to avoid being abandoned
- mistaking chemistry for compatibility
- clinging to people who feel like a high
- running from people who feel like peace

These years aren’t a moral failure.

They’re the natural outcome of Good Girl conditioning playing itself out in adult form.

And here's why.

## 1. Good Girls Don't Date — We Try To Recreate Our Emotional Blueprint

The nervous system remembers the first person who ever made you feel chosen.

That first love lays down the blueprint — not because it was perfect, or healthy, or destined, but because it was the first time you felt deeply seen and wanted.

Once you've been awakened like that, everything after gets filtered through the memory of that intensity.

We spend years chasing:

- the spark
- the pull
- the emotional high
- the illusion of safety nestled inside chaos

And when no one else makes us feel that combination again, we don't question the blueprint. We question *ourselves*.

Good Girls grow up scanning for emotional threat, so dating becomes another version of that scanning:

Conflict = threat.

Disappointment = danger.

Distance = abandonment.

Rejection = proof.

So when someone arrives with the same chemistry as that first love, your body whispers:

“This is what love feels like.”

Even if it isn't.

Mark was my blueprint.

Everyone after him was the comparison — not because he was the love of my life (if he was, God help me!), but because he was the first to imprint on my nervous system.

## 2. Heartbreak Hits Good Girls Differently

Most women see heartbreak as an event.

Good Girls experience it as an identity collapse.

Because when your self-worth was shaped around being chosen, being left feels like proof:

- that you're too much
- or not enough
- or unlovable
- or replaceable
- or fundamentally flawed

So we go into overdrive:

- chasing validation
- reinventing ourselves
- numbing with attention
- performing confidence
- pretending we're fine while crumbling inside
- turning travel into therapy
- turning intensity into intimacy
- turning "almost relationships" into epic internal narratives

We seek aliveness anywhere we can find it — especially in the places that cost us the most.

### 3. Our Emotional Availability Becomes a Double-Edged Sword

Good Girls feel things deeply — that’s our gift.

But it also becomes our vulnerability.

Good Girls often feel rejected not because they lack value, but because they carry a kind of emotional honesty that half-grown men can’t hold.

We weren’t repelling men because we were “too much.”

We were simply too real for half-grown, half-available men.

Our emotional honesty forces them to face themselves — and many can’t.

**Unavailable men want women who demand nothing of them.**

Good girls, by our very presence, ask for depth.

Not through words — but through:

- attention
- attunement
- openness
- emotional intelligence.

To the wrong men, this feels like pressure.  
To the right men, it feels like connection.

But in our twenties, most of us are still attracting the former.

## 4. Good Girls Are Drawn to Unavailable Men for Familiar Reasons

Good Girls confuse

Effort with worth.  
Pain with passion.  
Longing with love.  
Intensity with destiny.

Not because we're naive —  
because our nervous systems were trained that way.

Emotionally unavailable or inconsistent men feel electrifying because your nervous system learned early on to chase chaos and then soothe it with your Good Girl energy.

Unavailable men feel familiar because:

- If you grew up managing emotions, inconsistency feels normal.
- If you grew up earning love, distance feels like a challenge
- If you grew up walking on eggshells, anxiety feels like home.

So without realizing it, Good Girls gravitate toward men who:

- keep us guessing
- pull us in and push us away
- give just enough to keep the hope alive
- trigger anxiety we mistake for chemistry
- mirror the instability we grew up with

And the men who would treat us well?

We often feel... nothing.

Not because they're wrong.

***But because calm doesn't register as love when chaos is your first language.***

This is why the "Good Guys" never stuck.

Not because something was wrong with you — but because familiarity masqueraded as chemistry.

## **5. Good Girls Use Fantasy As Survival Strategy**

Fantasy is where our nervous system finally takes a breath.

Your travel years weren't reckless; they made you feel free, alive, and ready to try again at adapting to life.

You were creating alternate universes where:

- you were confident & bold
- you were magnetic & desired
- you weren't weighed down by family patterns
- you weren't "too much"
- you weren't the girl who failed a class or who got left

Fantasy also gives Good Girls a glimpse of who they might have been (if they'd grown up in emotionally-safer homes).

But fantasy isn't sustainable — it's a vacation from the nervous system, not a reset.

## **6. We Become Versions of Ourselves That Aren't Sustainable**

In our twenties, many of us shapeshift.

On any given day, we're either:

- the cool/chill girl
- the *"I'm totally fine being single"* girl
- the adventurous, sexy traveler
- the one-night-hit-of-confidence girl
- the emotionally available healer
- the emotionally unavailable runner
- the girl who swears she doesn't care
- the girl who cares more than anyone knows

We're trying on selves the way other people try on outfits — not because we're lost, but because we're trying to find the version of ourselves that someone will finally stick around for.

What we don't see yet is this:

Every version that isn't rooted in our actual identity eventually burns our nervous systems out.

## **7. By Our Early Thirties, the Pattern Cracks Us Open**

There comes a moment — sometimes gradual, sometimes dramatic — where the Good Girl settles for less than she deserves.

And she likely does so unconsciously.

Not because she failed.

But because she's exhausted.

Exhausted from:

- longing
- over-functioning
- internalizing every rejection
- chasing emotional breadcrumbs
- building fantasies out of almost-love
- pretending “easy” is who she is
- performing confidence
- shrinking herself to be chosen

This exhaustion isn't weakness.

**It's a *signal* from your nervous system.**

**The beginning of the woman you actually need to become.**

### **The Truth About What Feels Like “The Lost Decade”**

What feels like a decade (or more!) of heartbreak, mistakes, lost years, or wrong men is actually something else entirely:

***These are the decades of your discovery of how your “Good Girl” conditioning no longer serves you.***

It becomes visible.

Conscious.

Frustrating.

And that matters, because ***you cannot reclaim a self you're still unconscious about.***

These years don't break us.

They introduce us — painfully, beautifully — to the parts of ourselves we abandoned long before romantic love ever entered the picture.

This pain emerges for a woman when she's on the edge of transformation, still believing she's shattered, not realizing she's finally waking up.

These years weren't about love.  
They weren't even about heartbreak.

We have to go through it, but only then can we realize...

**They were about identity.**

**Awakening.**

**The beginning of self-awareness.**

**The seed of everything that comes next.**

That is where Chapter Two ends.

At the cliff-edge between longing and settling, hope and fear, desire and exhaustion.

And if you're anything like me, you won't recognize that awareness until much later — when the loss of identity and exhaustion make the settling more palpable.

Read on to find out what happens when that Good Girl becomes a wife.



# 3

CHAPTER

## THE GOOD GIRL BECOMES A WIFE

# PART A: THE MARRIAGE I TRIED TO BELIEVE IN

By the time I met Craig, I wasn't naïve.

I was exhausted — the kind of tired that comes after years of wanting a family so deeply, it begins to ache.

My twenties were full of almosts and not-yets, friends forming families while I held my breath waiting for my life to start.

My sister had built her world and moved into it, and I was happy for her — but painfully aware of my own aloneness.

So when Craig showed up with certainty, consistency, and this earnest desire to build a life with me, it hit every hungry, unclaimed place inside me.

In addition to that, we sparked. We had chemistry — real, embodied, surprising chemistry.

Months before meeting him, the adventurous “old” me had booked a camper to live in for the summer, and the lease started a month into dating.

Little did I know at the time how much work having a camper entailed or how to do it; but Craig came with that impressive skill set and more.

The day it was dropped off and he helped me set it up, I asked him to stay.

And stay, he did.

That month in the camper was a bubble of warm nights and guitar strings, firelight, long conversations, and the kind of sex that makes you believe, *“I could have sex with this person for the rest of my life.”*

There were moments that felt cinematic — enough to make me imagine that maybe, just maybe, this time the universe was handing me a plot twist in my favour.

And beneath all of it was the loudest longing of my twenties:

I wanted a family.

I wanted a home.

I wanted my turn.

But there is always a fracture — the one moment the Good Girl steps over because she is already imagining the life on the other side.

Mine wasn't subtle.

I tried to set boundaries on our rapidly evolving relationship. I wasn't ready, and I had oh-so-many reservations about him —

Honestly, the guy had more **red flags** than a Manchester United football tournament.

But he kept pushing the boundary.

Kept ignoring.

Kept acting like my boundaries were negotiable, or unnecessary, insisting as if he was the exception to every rule when it came to men and dating.

When I pushed back on a boundary once, 3 months in, he snapped — a word so sharp it turned the air to ice.

My body knew instantly:

*“This isn’t my person.*

*This isn’t safe.*

*This is just like I felt as a child.”*

I left. Quietly.

Shaken.

Disappointed.

Already grieving something that technically hadn’t even begun.

And then he came after me.

Apologizing.

Crying.

Showing up in a way I had never experienced.

And I went back.

Not because I was blind.

But because longing is its own logic.

Good Girls don’t ignore red flags out of stupidity.

We ignore them out of hope.

## **The Context Behind the Man**

Craig wasn't, and isn't, a monster nor a villain. But he came with storms older than us both:

- two kids from a teenage relationship that he had introduced to several women since parting from their mom (plus an awful, strained coparenting relationship between them);
- another daughter he never sees, from another traumatic relationship that ended badly;
- a seven-month marriage to a person with untreated mental illness, marked by volatility and broken trust, which shaped him to be a jealous and untrustful;
- impulsive decisions that detonated his own life's stability, caused massive debt, and trouble with the law;
- continuous lapses of employment; and
- unresolved trauma and insecurity which resulted in a domineering and arrogant side to his personality.

He arrived in my life already carrying chaos he never processed as unfit for a relationship with a woman like me, even after we began to show the signs of struggle much too early on .

And without realizing it, I stepped in believing I could anchor him, anchor the chaos of his life.

I didn't know yet that I was trying to build a home on a foundation made of sand.

## **The Slow Shrinking of a Woman**

It didn't happen overnight.  
It never does.

Piece by piece, I dimmed to stay afloat:

- boundaries softened, then disappeared
- independence replaced with managing his moods and choices
- confidence chipped away by arrogant or demeaning jokes disguised as humour
- friendships became complicated by jealousy
- sexuality became knotted in resentment
- dreams postponed
- financial stability slowly eroded
- identity worn down to caretaker, mediator, peacekeeper, and fixer

On the outside, I looked stable — “finally settled.”  
Inside, I was dissolving.

**Approval-seeking is a quiet thief.**

**It steals your instincts while convincing you you're doing the right thing.**

 **Fawn → Freeze → Fight:**  
**The Good Girl in Collapse**

This part is the hardest to admit — but also the truest:  
I was not the perfect, passive, peacekeeping Good Girl in marriage.

Before I was pregnant, and before the day our daughter arrived (the absolute last day I felt passionate enough to fight for *us* instead of *her*) - I was the Good Girl pushed past her limit:

pressed against every edge of her nervous system,  
cornered by her own silence,  
terrified of ending the life she tried to build,  
furious at herself for staying,  
and desperate to be freed.

When I snapped, I snapped violently:

I yelled.

I swore.

I degraded him.

I hit.

I broke things.

I made threats.

I weaponized the things I knew would hurt.

I didn't do these things because I wanted to harm him.

I did them because I couldn't find a way out.

This wasn't the opposite of being a Good Girl.

This was the emotional explosion of a Good Girl who had held everything in for too long.

When fawning stops working, the body switches to fight.

*And I was fighting for air.*

Of course, that doesn't excuse my behaviour. My emotional regulation, reactivity, and nervous system were beyond my comprehension only months into our relationship. I could not control my reactions, and at the time, I didn't understand why.

I take full responsibility and accountability for the harm I caused him, and I hope (and know) I've grown enough to never do that to another person again.

And, luckily, pregnancy shifted something. I still fought with words. I still weaponized emotion and his past. But somewhere in my body — in that primal maternal instinct — a calmer version of me resurfaced for our growing baby.

I no longer had need for the physical expression of my rage.

Not healed.  
Just holding on differently.

### **Motherhood Didn't Break Us — It Revealed Us**

When our daughter arrived 10 months after our marriage, everything that lacked in our relationship from day one became much more obvious.

The imbalance.  
The impulsivity.  
The emotional absence.  
The financial insecurity.

The resentment on both sides.

He stayed physically — and that matters.  
But he would never leave, even when I begged him to.

And emotionally? I was alone in ways that changed me.  
The version of me that once swallowed discomfort now  
choked on it.

Motherhood didn't make the marriage fail.  
It exposed every part that wasn't built to last.

### **The Shame Spiral**

Outside the house, I kept the strong front — or tried to.  
I felt like people saw through it anyway.

And when I finally confided in family, their response  
wasn't soothing.

They wanted me out of the relationship immediately —  
which made me feel even more ashamed for staying,  
more embarrassed for having chosen wrong, and more  
trapped between wanting to leave and wanting to prove I  
wasn't failing.

Their judgment didn't free me.  
It weighed me down.  
It confirmed my deepest fear:  
I didn't make a “good” choice.

So I stayed in the tension.  
Silent. Explosive.  
Hopeful. Miserable.

Trying to leave without being the one who left.

This is how many Good Girls unravel.

Not gently.

Not quietly.

But in a chaotic, heartbreaking mix of longing, resentment, fear, shame, and survival instinct.

### **When the Truth Became Undeniable**

The financial betrayal wasn't the beginning of the end — it was the moment the end stopped being avoidable.

The one-day gambling loss that led to maxed-out cards and lines of credit.

The overblown spending despite the financial peril.  
The carelessness while I was hanging on by threads.  
The emotional and physical withdrawal.  
The resentment thick enough to suffocate the house.  
The constant triggers.  
The week of silence where we barely spoke.

Somewhere in that silence, a simple truth surfaced:  
*"I can't live like this anymore."*

Cliché, maybe.

But it wasn't dramatic.  
It wasn't angry.  
It wasn't impulsive.  
It was clarity.

## **The Final Realization**

Craig loved me — in his way.  
He showed up — in his way.  
He tried — in his way.

But compatibility wasn't on our side.  
My nervous system wasn't on our side.  
Emotional safety wasn't on our side.  
Stability wasn't on our side.

And I see now that I didn't stay because I believed it was right.  
I stayed because I believed to keep fighting was the only way to have the life I eventually wanted.

**That isn't failure.  
It is human.**

And leaving wasn't giving up.

**It was the first moment I chose myself in years.**

# Healing Mantras

**“Being chosen is not the same as being safe.”**

**“I do not have to betray myself to belong.”**

**“Longing & discontent are not signals from your body that something is wrong with you. They are signals that something inside of you wants to GROW.”**

**@ G O O D G I R L D E T O X**

## PART B: THE MIND OF A GIRL WHEN LOVE ACTIVATES SURVIVAL

Marriage doesn't change a woman; it reveals her conditioning.

And for many women — especially those raised to seek approval, maintain harmony, or hold emotional responsibility — marriage becomes the first place where that conditioning is stretched beyond its capacity.

Some women shrink to preserve peace.

Some over-function until there is nothing left of them.

Some stay soft and quiet even as their insides fray.

Some develop burnout that masquerades as irritability.

Some fight because it's the only way their trapped body can speak.

Some freeze into a kind of emotional numbness that looks like depression but is really depletion.

The reaction varies — but the underlying strain is often the same:

**a nervous system carrying more than it was ever meant to hold.**

## Approval Seeking as Emotional Labor

Good Girls walk into marriage with a lifelong habit:

*“If I can keep the environment stable, I’ll be okay.”*

Not because they enjoy self-sacrifice, but because:

- harmony = safety
- approval = belonging
- being needed = being valuable
- being easy to love = not being abandoned

This isn’t personality — it’s neuropsychology.

It is the brain’s learned strategy for maintaining attachment.

In marriage, this can look like:

- absorbing emotional dips to avoid conflict
- softening their needs to keep the peace
- caretaking their partner’s moods or missteps
- staying silent about concerns
- tolerating more than they should
- carrying an invisible mental load
- pushing down the early signs of incompatibility
- priding themselves on endurance

Over time, this emotional labor accumulates like plaque — not in the arteries, but in the nervous system — quietly building until it constricts everything.

## **The Good Girl Postpartum: When the Body Reveals Her Inner Truth**

Motherhood doesn't create marital cracks; it exposes them with surgical clarity.

A woman's nervous system in the first year postpartum is:

- sensitized
- stretched thin
- sleep-deprived
- hyper-aware of danger
- flooded with cortisol
- running on instinct more than reasoning
- deeply vulnerable to depression and anxiety

This is not abnormal, or weakness — it's normal physiology.

And when she adds:

- financial strain
- emotional under-support
- unpredictable partner behavior
- chronic conflict
- the mental load
- the identity shift
- unresolved childhood patterns
- her own perfectionism
- the pressure to “do it all”
- long term sleep deprivation

— the nervous system hits overload.

The truth is, girl — **you are suffering from chronic stress.**

That's it. No further explanation to yourself or others needed.

But I will keep explaining it to you, so that you drive it home.

One of the strongest and most well-established findings in neuro-behavioural science is that

### **Prolonged, disrupted, and/or poor quality SLEEP**

as commonly experienced during the postpartum period (which realistically extends well beyond the first year, often closer to 18 months) — is *strongly associated* with impaired:

- hormonal regulation,
- nervous system regulation,
- emotional regulation, and
- overall mental health outcomes

In that context, postpartum anger, overwhelm, weepiness, irritability, numbness, detachment, intrusive thoughts, resentment, and cognitive fog are **not moral issues** (and they are not your fault).

They are normal physiological responses to an unsustainable load.

## **The Four Survival Responses in Marriage**

Not every woman becomes a fighter.

Not every woman becomes a fawner.

Not every woman disappears into numbness.

But most women touch at least one of these:

### **1. Fawn**

- over-apologizing
- smoothing conflict
- shrinking (staying small, quiet) to keep stability
- staying silent to avoid conflict or being judged
- placating - trying to keep the peace by appeasing someone else.

### **2. Fight**

- anger & irritability
- explosive moments
- emotional outbursts
- saying things from a dysregulated place
- sensory overload creating reactivity

### **3. Flight (Flee)**

- fantasizing about leaving
- overworking or busying herself
- avoiding intimacy and/or conflict
- mentally exiting a relationship

#### 4. Freeze/Collapse

- depression or persistent low mood
- emotional numbness or detachment
- sleep disturbances
- low motivation or apathy
- feeling trapped or immobilized
- loss of pleasure, desire, or libido
- “I don’t recognize myself anymore.”

A woman may cycle through all four responses. She may live predominantly in one.

She may remain in fawn until she breaks. She may freeze instead of exploding. She may become numb before she becomes angry.

There is no single “Good Girl pattern.”

***There is only a nervous system trying to survive.***

#### **The Identity Collapse**

One of the quietest tragedies of marriage — especially early marriage, especially early motherhood — is the way a woman’s identity gets diluted into roles:

- partner
- mother
- caretaker
- manager
- emotional thermostat
- stabilizer
- peacekeeper

And when her needs aren't met, or her intuition is overridden, or her partner is not emotionally safe, the dilution becomes a full erosion.

Women describe it the same way across cultures:

"I don't feel like myself."

"I feel like I'm disappearing."

"I'm numb."

"I'm trapped."

"I feel empty."

"I can't feel anything but exhausted."

"I'm angry all the time."

"I don't know who I am outside of keeping this house running."

"I don't know how to have fun anymore."

This is called **identity foreclosure** — the psychological state in which a woman's sense of self becomes eclipsed by her roles: wife, mother, caretaker, manager, stabilizer.

**It is one of the most common — and least named — psychological injuries experienced by women in early marriage and the postpartum period.**

It is not dramatic.

It is not rare.

It is not your fault.

It is a *predictable outcome* of chronic misalignment and self-abandonment.

## **The Good Girl Awakening**

At some point — for some women — the system finally says:

*“This is not sustainable.”*

That is the beginning of re-entry into her own life.

And it rarely feels triumphant.

It feels like:

- grief
- clarity
- guilt
- relief
- fear
- exhaustion
- a soft, steady truth whispering: “I can’t live like this anymore.”

Not because they are weak.

Not because they didn’t try.

But because their body, mind, and spirit can’t survive the mismatch any longer.

And the awakening looks different for everyone:

- some leave quietly
- some explode
- some collapse into depression
- some detach emotionally
- some seek therapy

- some numb out
- some get physically sick
- some finally speak the truth
- some choose themselves for the first time

But the essence is the same:

The woman who spent years trying to make the marriage work finally turns toward the part of herself she's been abandoning.

That line is not a threat.

It is not a failure.

It is not the end of love.

***It is the beginning of her return to self, and self-love.***



# CHAPTER

# 4

## THE GOOD GIRL UNRAVELS

## PART A: THE BREAKDOWN I DIDN'T SEE COMING

In January 2025, I made a New Year's resolution to have a *"Mommy Glow Up."*

I was tired of feeling low, gaining weight, and watching my energy evaporate. I thought it was normal at seven months postpartum — the "new mom slump," something I could fix if I just tried harder.

By March, every *"Mommy Glow Up"* attempt had failed — and drained what little maternity leave budget I had.

Cleanses, metabolism-boosting supplements, app-based workout plans, skincare routines, clothes for a job I didn't even have yet. All of it collapsed under the weight of a body that was begging me to stop.

My body was screaming:

- persistent exhaustion (who has the will for 12-step skincare routine when even basic tasks feel unbearable?)
- hormonal chaos
- terrible face and body acne
- unexplained weight gain despite constant effort
- body odour and bad breath that made no sense
- brain fog so thick I wondered about cognitive decline
- memory glitches that scared me
- irritability
- overstimulation

I didn't want to start another day.

Not because I didn't love my daughter — I loved her fiercely — but because the loop I was living inside had become unbearable:

Wake.

Feed baby.

Clean up after baby.

Play with baby.

Feed and clean up after myself.

Clean up after Craig (seemingly endlessly).

Repeat this part of day 3x (as in, the number of meals per day, the number of times I moved the baby around the house or yard for novelty, and the number of times I argued with Craig).

Care for the dog.

Think, "I should be doing more" — workouts, cooking, dog and baby walks more often, errands.

Go to bed exhausted while Craig muttered that I was "always tired."

Repeat day eternally.

And most mornings, this was too much to bear.

Craig started to get up with the baby so I could sleep, despite my going to bed much earlier than him.

I was that depleted.

It was nice of him, but I'm sure he only started doing this after several arguments that he *"wasn't doing enough"* and he was tired of my nagging.

## **The Hope That Masked the Cracks**

When we decided to move back to our hometown, I told myself things would finally get easier. I was convinced the problem was isolation — that living up north, alone with a new baby, with a partner who was absent both physically and emotionally, and no social outlets, was what had been wearing me down.

I believed being close to family again — having help, having outings I didn't need to miss, fewer long drives, no travel with a baby — would be the reset I needed. That I'd feel less alone. That maybe this life would finally feel like it was beginning instead of falling apart.

And in some ways, that part was true.

I did have support.

I did have people around.

I did have hands to help with Soleil.

But the move itself was hell — not because of the destination, but because I moved with Craig. I know it sounds like I hated him - I did and I didn't - but I felt like he hated me too.

He insisted on doing everything his way, alone, while simultaneously resenting me for not being able to lift the heavy stuff.

It was our entire dynamic distilled into one moment: wanting to protect me and resenting me for needing protection.

## The Quiet Numbing

Notably, alcoholism runs in my family — a legacy I'd already spent years trying not to repeat. Another landmine I had to side-step with my Good Girl behaviour while growing up. So, when I began drinking more, I watched myself closely.

I knew the signs. I knew the patterns. I knew what real alcoholism looks like — and this wasn't that.

What was happening wasn't alcoholism.  
It was coping.

I wasn't drinking all day or drinking recklessly.  
I was drinking subtly.  
Strategically.

The way women drink when they need something — anything — to quiet the grief they never say aloud.

A drink to soften the loneliness.  
A drink to silence the discontent.  
A drink to feel less trapped.  
A drink to stop feeling how deeply unhappy I had become.

Alcohol and postpartum physiology are a toxic mix — and my body let me know it immediately. The hormonal chaos, the cortisol spikes, the disrupted neurotransmitters... I felt like garbage both inside and out.

But the important truth is this:  
**My drinking wasn't the problem.**  
**It was a symptom.**

A warning light on a dashboard I had been trying to ignore.

The drinking didn't mean I was an alcoholic.

It meant I was drowning.

### **The Breaking Point**

Three weeks after moving back home, I broke.

Not a cinematic breakdown.

A quiet, suffocating, unstoppable unraveling.

One day, I started crying.

And I couldn't stop.

No single reason — just another argument, another emotional bruise — but it wasn't the argument itself.

It was the collapse of months of carrying too much. Months of swallowing disappointment, of living in survival mode, of being overstimulated, under-supported, and chronically overwhelmed.

The sobbing terrified me. It wasn't sadness. It was panic. It was grief. It was cortisol spilling over the edges of a body that had been red-lining far too long.

I called the crisis line.

I was shaking.

Still crying.

Unable to function.

I was terrified by the intensity of how badly I felt.  
They told me to come in immediately.

## **The Crisis**

I was already on meds.

I had gone back on them around five months postpartum, near the end of breastfeeding — a draining love-hate cycle that consumed me emotionally and physically. Pumping had become its own kind of torment; stopping was both liberating and heartbreaking (as many moms know).

But the meds weren't working.  
Not at all.

At the crisis centre, I saw a crisis counsellor, a psychiatrist, and an addictions counsellor. The addictions counsellor had me pegged as an alcoholic within ten minutes — until I pushed back.

Alcohol wasn't my problem.  
Alcohol was my symptom.

The problem was my life.

The psychiatrist changed my medication.  
I was referred to therapy.

I just wanted to feel like myself again, and I was willing to do anything to achieve that.

And then, our finances collapsed.

With my situation worsening by the week, I continued to spiral. Two steps forward, ten steps back. I wondered how on earth I would ever feel better, or ever feel like myself again, having this happened.

And then for the first time, a therapist said out loud what I had been silently suffering through:

*“But you’re not even getting your **basic needs** met.”*

Maslow’s hierarchy, in real time.

How could I be expected to thrive when I wasn’t even surviving?

### **The Flicker of Stabilization**

Despite the mess that was now my credit and finances, switching meds was the first real shift:

- my cravings for alcohol faded
- my energy flickered back
- my emotions finally steadied enough for me to function

And then summer came — the summer I got better and worse at the same time.

My mood lifted.

My functioning improved.

I got a job in my field of public health — a major win (for the time).

I started Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), covered by provincial healthcare — a lifeline for my nervous system.

And I stayed hopeful that maybe, just maybe, my family could still work.

### **When Silence Says More Than Words**

But Craig didn't change in any way that supported my healing. If anything, his patterns deepened.

I was back to work, and he was still unemployed. He was home every day, but wasn't pulling his weight. He spent most of his time on "projects" outside that took the whole summer to complete.

He gambled daily — "to make money" — but the money going out was more than the money coming in.

I sought help for his gambling problem — but he kept on, putting my boundaries off by saying this "was the only way to make money right now," a means to an end.

He wouldn't stop, despite my getting help and him maxing out 2 credit cards and a line of credit.

He created messes faster than I could clean them. He'd open packages and toss the garbage on the floor "*to get later,*" which "later" never came.

He kept the yard and pool unusable — garbage from his "projects" (and thirst) everywhere, clothing strewn across the ground, wet towels curled in sopping piles after storms.

He criticized me constantly — for not cleaning enough, for losing interest in the house and pool upkeep — while working 40 hours a week in the life I no longer had the capacity to sustain.

And you can only imagine *just how much* I was nagging him.

He obtained a gun license after I explicitly said no — a boundary violation that cracked something deep inside me.

He “escaped” to golf and pick-up hockey at every opportunity — which means every day I was working from home, the baby had alternate care, and I wasn’t actively falling apart.

Resentment hardened between us.  
More than resentment — despair.

Then came the August silence — a full week of barely speaking.

Then came the hunting trip he booked without even running it by me.

And that was the moment something inside me clicked.

We are no longer partners.  
This is no longer a marriage.

I got my own place that same week.  
Packed quietly.  
Moved out while he was away hunting, in October — seven months after the breakdown.

And, with the exception of my travel “fantasy” self, this was my first shedding of Good Girl behaviour (in my real life) since those dark years in university.

I was 38 years old.

## **Seven Months and Still Unraveling**

When the unraveling began, it wasn't when the suffering began.

Clearly, it started long before that.

And even once I left him, I wasn't finished suffering.

No — the breakdown definitely wasn't the end, like you would think.

It was the beginning.

There was more hardship ahead.

More Good Girl conditioning to shed.

More collapse to name.

More identity to rebuild.

More truth to face — including the continued unraveling as now happening in my career.

Read on in Chapter 5 to learn how Good Girls function in school and work — and how that very performance can become the barrier to their true success.

# Healing Mantras

“My breakdown was not a failure of strength — it was my body telling the truth I could no longer hide.”

“I was not breaking down — I was breaking free from the life that broke me.”

“What unraveled me is not what defines me. What I choose next does.”

@ G O O D G I R L D E T O X

## PART B: THE MIND OF A GOOD GIRL COMING UNDONE

There's a particular kind of unraveling that happens to women like us — the ones who tried to hold everything together long after everything stopped holding us.

It's not dramatic or sudden. It doesn't happen in a single moment, or because of a single event. It's cumulative. Layered. Physiological. Emotional. Hormonal. Psychological. Situational.

It is the kind of collapse that comes from carrying a load so heavy, for so long, that the body eventually refuses to continue.

Most Good Girls don't fall apart in spectacular ways. Many don't scream or smash things or run away in the night.

It starts slowly.

Good Girls begin to break in ways that look like protecting their reality:

- “I'm just overtired.”
- “I must be hormonal.”
- “I'm probably overreacting.”
- “I don't know what's wrong with me.”
- “I shouldn't feel this way — I have so much to be grateful for.”

We learn early to mistrust our own pain.

And because of that, Good Girls unravel quietly — and usually alone — having already distanced themselves from their support systems, afraid their pain is a personal failing.

### **Why Good Girls Break Quietly**

Good Girls internalize:

- other people's comfort as responsibility
- other people's needs as priority
- other people's disappointment as danger
- other people's judgment as truth
- other people's validation as a necessity

So when marriage or motherhood becomes overwhelming, she doesn't explode at first.

She endures.

She reasons.

She explains.

She adjusts.

She compensates.

She becomes stronger where she should be supported.

She becomes flexible where she should be firm.

She becomes silent where she should be heard.

This isn't weakness.

This is attachment survival.

Good Girls were trained to keep the environment stable — not themselves.

## **The Unraveling Is Physiological Before It Is Psychological**

For most women, the breakdown doesn't begin in the mind.

It begins in the body.

Sometimes, as in my case, it becomes a full-system overload — the moment the nervous system, hormones, brain chemistry, emotional capacity, and survival instincts can no longer compensate for the life being lived.

Contributing factors include:

- chronic sleep deprivation
- postpartum hormonal flux
- cortisol overload
- emotional labor with no reciprocity
- overstimulation
- lack of support
- identity loss
- accumulated resentment
- partners who can't or won't meet them halfway
- unmet basic needs (food, housing, financial safety etc.)

### **A Note on Basic Needs**

Maslow's hierarchy is simple in theory and brutal in practice:

- without safety (lack of crises), there is no stability (or basic needs).
- without stability, there is no self-esteem.
- without self-esteem, there is no self-actualization.
- without self-actualization, there is no identity.
- without identity, there is no serenity (i.e., no peace).



A woman cannot become her “best self,” cannot “glow up,” cannot thrive — when the foundation beneath her is unstable.

Without the lower layers of the pyramid met, she cannot climb to the next level. Being “best self” is impossible when she’s barely surviving.

An overactive nervous system (from crises, or her basic needs not being met, whether she realizes it or not) does not allow a woman to thrive.

It compels her to break.

## **The Body Knows Before the Mind**

The body sends warnings long before the mind recognizes the danger:

- irritability
- fatigue that no amount of sleep fixes
- sensitivity to noise and light
- memory glitches
- skin changes (dryness, acne, rashes, flare-ups)
- appetite changes
- libido loss
- crying “for no reason”
- anxiety that feels like electricity under the skin
- depression that feels like gravity in the bones
- weight gain (or loss — though neither is neutral)

These are not character flaws.

This is not weakness.

This is not mere burnout.

This is **stress physiology**, clinically known as *allostatic overload* — the collapse that occurs when a woman’s stress load exceeds her body’s ability to adapt.

The pattern often looks like:

➤ Sympathetic Flooding  
(overactivation — panic, crying, anger, inability to regulate)

Followed by:

➤ Parasympathetic Collapse  
(shutdown, numbness, hopelessness, dissociation, exhaustion)

Every Good Girl beyond her limit knows this collapse intimately, even if she's never had a name for it.

## **The Nervous System Knows the Truth**

A breakdown is not a mental event.  
It is a full-body protest.

It is not a personality flaw.  
It is the moment the entire system — body, brain, emotions, hormones, trauma history — implodes.

The nervous system says:

*“We cannot go on like this anymore.”*

And the breaking point isn't failure.

### **It's honesty.**

For some women, the unraveling looks like explosive rage.

For many, it looks like tears that won't stop.

For others, it's numbness, shutdown, or becoming eerily functional.

Not every Good Girl explodes in her turmoil.

- Some go silent.
- Some become hollow.
- Some over-function to the point of collapse.
- Some develop unexplained physical symptoms.
- Some stay outwardly peaceful while falling apart inside.

There is no right or wrong response.  
There is only the nervous system doing whatever it must  
to survive.

I fought — because that was my survival pattern.

Other women freeze.  
Others increasingly fawn.  
Others run.  
Others collapse.  
Others disappear.

Survival is not pretty, but it is instinctual.

### **What the Unraveling Reveals**

The unraveling is when a woman finally sees:

- the marriage isn't sustainable
- the workload isn't equitable
- the emotional labor isn't reciprocated
- the support isn't reliable
- the partner isn't showing up
- the identity she built is too small for who she has become
- the exhaustion isn't temporary
- the resentment isn't irrational
- the symptoms are not “just hormones”
- the life she's living is not the one she imagined
- and the cost of staying silent is now too high

The unraveling is not the end.

It is the x-ray of her life — revealing every hidden fracture.

## **The Universal Arc of a Good Girl's Breakdown**

While the order shifts, the arc is familiar:

### **1. Overfunctioning**

"If I just try harder, this will get better."

### **2. Self-blame**

"This must be my fault."

### **3. Distress tolerance beyond human capacity**

"I just need to make it through this phase."

### **4. Early symptoms**

Exhaustion, resentment, irritability, numbness, tears.

### **5. Crisis spike**

The day the body says, "No more."

### **6. Seeking help**

Crisis lines, therapy, medication, a friend, a breaking-point moment.

### **7. Clarity**

"I can't. Not like this."

### **8. Identity shift**

She begins to see how far she drifted from herself.

### **9. The beginning of return**

She engages in therapy, nervous system work, boundaries, truth-telling, support, and/or stabilization.

### **10. Choosing herself**

Often for the first time in years.

This pattern isn't mine alone.

It's ours — the collective arc of the Good Girl who has lived too long inside the story of endurance.

And, importantly:

It is not the end of the story.

**It is the beginning of her transformation.**



# 5

**C H A P T E R**

## **THE GOOD GIRL IN SCHOOL & WORK**

# PART A: HOW I CONSTANTLY CHOSE SAFE OVER MYSELF

I know this isn't the most "juicy" of chapter titles, especially compared to the others. However — I insist — this is one of the most important, and perhaps one of the most resonant chapters for many of you.

This is where the Good Girl learns that safety can become a cage.

We touched earlier on what school was like for me, and how those environments help form Good Girls.

In retrospect, I think I had some classic symptoms of ADHD as well — something that is far less commonly noticed in girls. I have just received an ADHD diagnosis as an adult, as part of my collapse was that these symptoms became impossible to ignore.

But I didn't start out as a hyper-achiever. I didn't realize, until I was pre-teen, just how much doing well in school could earn me approval. I was a good student in childhood — some A's, mostly mid-to-high B's — and I tried hard, but I was also a daydreamer, often distracted by my own inner world.

Until one day, after my final report card in grade seven, in comparison to my sister's first shining high school report card, I overheard my dad tell my mom:

*"Too bad that the other one is a B-student."*

It wasn't cruel. It wasn't meant for me to hear. But it landed like a prophecy.

A ceiling.

A definition.

A warning.

And something in me snapped into place — not rebellion, not outrage, but devotion.

If he thought I was “just” a B-student, then I would become *anything but* that.

From that moment forward, I became a machine of achievement. Straight A's. Honour Roll. Class valedictorian (yes, of grade school — but to me it was proof). My average climbed higher every year, as I collected praise like oxygen that fueled a fire.

People talked about me differently:

*“She's smart.”*

*“She's bright.”*

*“She's so responsible.”*

Subtext: ***“She's doing everything right.”***

I didn't realize it then, but that was the moment my Good Girl identity fused with academic performance.

If I excelled, I was safe.

If I impressed, I was loved.

If I perfected myself, no one could doubt me — or hurt me.

By the time I graduated high school, I had a whole identity built on that version of “good, ” including scholarships for academic and extra-curricular achievements.

It felt like I had become the daughter my father admired, the girl teachers pointed to with approval, the student who hit every measurable marker of “promise.”

And beneath all that accomplishment lived a truth I wouldn't face for years:

This was the last time I was going to feel like my *true* self for a *loong* time.

### **The First Whispers of Longing & Discontent**

Originally, I told everyone I wanted to be a pediatrician. Let's be honest: my dad loved the idea of a doctor in the family, and I loved that he loved it.

But when it came time to choose, something in me faltered. I realized quickly I didn't have the math confidence — or the emotional stamina — for a decade-long medical path, especially without the kind of support or structured teaching I'd had from my admiring teachers in high school.

So, I pivoted.

Nursing felt like a safer version of “doctor” — respectable, practical, employable.

Close enough to appease my dad (I remember a conversation where I insisted, “*you can become a doctor with a nursing degree!*”), yet attainable enough not to terrify me.

It wasn’t the *wrong* choice.  
But it was the *only* choice I let myself have.

It was a Good Girl choice — a compromise between desire and duty.

I knew my dad might look down on an undergraduate degree that didn’t lead to a concrete career — like in the arts or social sciences.

And so, I went to Nursing at Western University.

A new city.  
A new identity.  
A freedom that tasted intoxicating.

But every year of nursing school, in virtually every practicum, a small voice whispered:

***“This isn’t you.  
You don’t love this work.  
This isn’t the life you want.”***

I ignored it — as Good Girls do.

I stayed the course (even through all the drama of chapter 2).

I graduated on time with my class (barely)

I became a registered nurse at 21 — and for a moment, that was enough.

Money, independence, travel, escape from the claustrophobia of my parents' home.

But my early nursing jobs?  
*Nightmarish.*

The bedside care, the shift work, the “*nurses eat their young*” culture, the emotional labour when I could barely tend to my own wounds — and yes, still in the shadow of my breakup(s) with Mark (did I mention we dated again right after graduation?)— drained me faster than I could recover.

I escaped to camp nursing every summer; I loved being up north as a kid, and was hoping it might feel liberating.

But even there, surrounded by fun and youth and play, I was still “the nurse” — the responsible one, the sober one, the one who wasn't allowed to just be a carefree twenty-something.

Even my escapes had a “Good Girl” role attached.

### **The Whispers That Went Ignored**

Two years into my nursing career, burnt out and quietly miserable, I did something bold:

I applied to Humber College's Public Relations program.

Thousands applied annually.  
Only 300 were accepted.  
And I was one of them.

I aced the practical portion.  
I nailed the in-person interview.

I walked out feeling something I hadn't felt in a long time,  
a rush of aliveness and excitement:

*"This is who I could be. A confident, expressive,  
compelling woman with an interesting life."*

PR fit me — the writing, the speaking, the creativity, the  
variety, the potential exciting career and lifestyle.

It fed the parts of me that had thrived in drama, in  
writing, in presentations, in leadership, in storytelling —  
performance that was about expression, not perfection.

But when the offer came?

I declined.

Not because I couldn't do it.  
But because I was terrified.

Terrified of life changing again.  
Terrified of leaving home after convincing myself my  
misery came from living away.  
Terrified of choosing a path without guaranteed approval.  
Terrified of failing in a big city like Toronto.

The Good Girl in me chose safety.

Not self.

## **My Public Health Career: A Partial Reclamation**

Six months after turning down my acceptance, I got a job at the local public health unit — and for the first time in years, I felt aligned.

Not fully seen, but not invisible either.

It was structured.

Predictable.

Community-focused.

Intellectual in a way front-line nursing care hadn't been.

The roles rotated, and incorporated my love of teaching, leading, and being a subject-matter “expert.”

The learning was stimulating.

And I became competent — quickly — moving into new positions as soon as I mastered the old ones.

It almost felt like a calling.

But even in public health, the Good Girl patterns persisted:

Set a standard for excellence.

Be pleasant.

Be reliable.

Be impressive.

Ask for permission, and not forgiveness.

Take on more.

Assimilate quietly.

Burn out silently.

And in my eighth year, I did what Good Girls do when they want to level up their worth:

I enrolled in a Masters of Public Health.

Full-time work.

Full-time school.

Living at home with my distressed, anxious parents.

Funding it myself because I didn't want the "strings attached" guilt.

And dating a rotating cast of men who kept my self-esteem on life support.

The program lit me up.

The rest of my life dimmed me down.

I enrolled in 2019. When COVID hit in early 2020, we all knew life as we knew it would be forever changed – and not in a positive way.

And by 2021, just as I was about to graduate — exhausted, accomplished, empty — I met Craig.

The "a-ha!" moment I didn't recognize as a trauma-bond in real time.

The lifeline that would become the undertow.

The escape that would eventually become another cage.

## The Ugly Truth About My Life Choices

From there, the professional story wound itself into the personal:

- the identity erosion into nurse, public health expert, and girlfriend/wife of a jealous man;
- the move up north to take a job where Craig *finally* found work;
- the financial strain from Craig that never left, despite this employment, and always teased and tested me in one way shape or form; and
- the burnout from intense people-pleasing that slowly simmered for almost 4 years until boiling over (as you read in Chapter 4).

Because long before a woman breaks in marriage or motherhood,  
long before her nervous system collapses,  
long before she lands in crisis...

**She has already abandoned herself a thousand quiet times** in classrooms, in workplaces, in relationships, in decisions where she chose safe over sovereign.

Those choices built the version of me who unraveled.  
And now, I'm learning to rewrite them.

My ambition was born from fear.

My next chapter will be born from this truth:

***“The path that kept me safe is NOT the path that will set me free.”***

# Healing Mantras

“I am allowed to choose alignment over approval.”

“My worth was never meant to be proven.”

“The path that tried to keep me safe is not the path I need to keep walking.”

@ G O O D G I R L D E T O X

# PART B: THE MIND OF A GOOD GIRL IN SCHOOL & WORK

The Good Girl, almost always, thrives in school.

Not because she's naturally gifted or effortlessly brilliant, though she might be.

But because school rewards the very traits she was conditioned into long before she walked through its doors:

- obedience
- discipline
- compliance
- likability
- performance
- perfection
- self-sacrifice

School was the first stage where she learned that being exceptional was safer than being herself.

And so, she became exceptional.

**But never free.**

## **Where Good Girl Conditioning Meets Achievement**

Good Girls often become high achievers for one reason:

### **Validation is their oxygen.**

They don't just want to do well — they *need* to.

Because achievement is the only place they receive:

- praise
- approval
- attention
- reassurance
- predictability
- a sense of worth
- a sense of safety

And when you give a girl praise for performing, she will perform her entire way through life — even when it costs her the self she is suppressing to stay “good.”

This is why Good Girls so often:

- overachieve academically
- excel in extracurriculars
- carry impossible workloads
- bend their identities to fit expectations
- ignore their inner signals
- choose careers based on stability over desire
- silence doubts and “intuitions” that feel inconvenient

She becomes fluent in excellence — but illiterate in desire.

## **The Good Girl Career Path: Safe, Predictable, & Practical**

Good Girls rarely choose careers based on passion alone. They choose careers that are:

- respectable
- stable
- admired
- employable
- convenient for family expectations
- “practical” and/or “smart”
- guaranteed to make people proud
- guaranteed to make money

It’s not that they lack ambition.

It’s that their ambition becomes shaped by who they’re trying to please.

When she chooses a degree, a program, a profession, she’s often choosing:

- the version of herself that will get the most approval
- not the version of herself she actually wants to become

And because Good Girls are adaptable, responsible, and capable, they succeed anyway.

But the success feels hollow.

Or heavy.

Or misaligned.

Or like a life she got good at— not a life she chose.

## **Why Good Girls Don't Pivot (Even When They Want To)**

When a Good Girl realizes she's on the wrong path — whether in school, a program, or a career — she doesn't pivot.

She perseveres.

Because pivoting feels like:

- failure
- wasted time and potential
- disappointing her parents
- admitting she made a mistake
- abandoning the version of her people were proud of
- stepping into uncertainty
- risking being “mediocre” somewhere new

So she stays.

She doubles down.

She adapts.

She over-functions.

She makes it work.

She strives her way out of misalignment.

And in doing so, she becomes successful in a life that quietly suffocates her.

## **The Approval Trap: How Good Girls Confuse Excellence with Worth**

Good Girls rarely believe they are enough —they believe they must achieve their way into enoughness.

So they push.

Hard.

Too hard.

They internalize:

- *“If I do well, I matter.”*
- *“If I impress them, I’m safe.”*
- *“If I succeed, I’ll be loved.”*
- *“If I perform, I won’t be abandoned.”*
- *“If I follow the rules, nothing bad will happen.”*

And because they are high-functioning, people rarely see the cost.

Teachers praise them. Employers rely on them.  
Partners benefit from them. Parents boast about them.

But inside?

She feels like a house built on scaffolding — **functional, impressive, but one strong wind away from collapse.**

## **The Hidden Burnout of the Hyper-Competent Woman**

Burnout doesn't hit the Good Girl early.

She's too adaptive, too resilient, too skilled at self-  
overriding.

It hits:

- in higher education, when the cracks begin to appear
- in her twenties, when she's too afraid to seize opportunities that present themselves
- in her early career, when she's competent but unfulfilled
- in her thirties, when she realizes she's built a life based on other people's expectations of her, and not her own
- after becoming a mother, when excellence collides with exhaustion, and performing becomes impossible
- during grief, transition, or crisis, when the old identity breaks

Good Girls don't burn out because they're weak.

Good Girls burn out because they have been ***strong for too long in the wrong direction.***

## **The Good Girl's Invisible Wound: She Never Learned to Want**

This is the core truth:

Good Girls know how to succeed.  
They don't know how to *want*.

They know:

- how to adapt
- how to achieve
- how to survive chaos
- how to make people proud
- how to fit in and meet expectations
- how to hold everything together

But they were never taught:

- how to choose themselves
- how to listen to desire
- how to take risks
- how to disappoint others gracefully
- how to trust their intuition
- how to pursue what lights them up
- how to start over
- how to break rules

So when the moment comes to leap toward their true self — whether in school, career, or adulthood — they hesitate.

Not because they lack potential.

Because they lack permission.

## **The Universal Arc of the Good Girl's Academic & Career Awakening**

While timelines differ, the arc is similar:

### **1. Early praise**

*"You're such a good student."*

### **2. Achievement becomes identity**

*"If I excel, I'm worthy."*

### **3. Career chosen for safety, approval, or stability**

*"This is what good girls do."*

### **4. Internal whispers of misalignment**

*"This isn't me."*

### **5. Pushing harder to silence those whispers**

*"Maybe if I achieve more, I'll be content..."*

### **6. Burnout or breakdown**

*"My body won't do this anymore."*

### **7. Recognition of the cage**

*"I built a life that doesn't fit me."*

### **8. The first rebellious thought**

*"What if I chose myself?"*

### **9. The terrifying middle**

Unlearning the old identity with no new one yet formed.

### **10. The emergence**

Desire returns. Intuition returns. Selfhood returns.

And that is the beginning of the woman's real career — the one she chooses on purpose.

### **What the Good Girl Must Eventually Learn**

You cannot build your life out of other people's expectations  
and expect it to feel like home.

You cannot perform your way into authenticity.  
You cannot excel your way into liberation.  
You cannot achieve your way into self-worth.

At some point,  
the Good Girl must die  
so the Sovereign Woman can live.



# 6

**C H A P T E R**

**WHERE THE GOOD  
GIRL ENDS, THE  
SOVEREIGN WOMAN  
BEGINS**

## PART A: WHEN I REALIZED THAT I WAS A “GOOD GIRL”

I had been working in Public Health again after moving home from up north and maternity leave — back in the same organization where I had spent a decade as a nurse. Only this time, I wasn't nursing. I had been hired as a Health Promotion Specialist — a title that sounded impressive, a title my old self might have proudly wrapped her identity around.

But behind the title was the truth:

It was 10x the responsibility and the exact same pay as a nurse, inside a system that was meticulous, performative, self-congratulatory, virtue-signaling, and structurally indifferent to the human beings working inside it.

I had already been through more than most people knew:

postpartum recovery,  
identity loss,  
a full nervous-system breakdown,  
momentous financial strain,  
executive functioning stretched past its limit,  
and finally, a huge betrayal leading to a separation.

It wasn't one crisis — it was layer upon layer of collapse, each one stripping away pieces of the functioning, competent professional I once was, and exposing a truth I could no longer outrun:

**the life I had been living was no longer sustainable.**

Most people imagine firings as explosive — dramatic confrontations, shouting, HR theatrics.

Mine was none of that.

No shock.

No spectacle.

No sudden shattering.

No sense of grief.

By the time I walked out of that building for the last time, I felt something closer to an out-of-body awareness — a strange, sterile calm mixed with disbelief:

*“I can’t believe that a person like me — the rule-follower, the overachiever, a good girl who devoted her life to public health and this workplace — is getting fired.”*

But the truth?

I had known for weeks.

My body knew long before my mind accepted it.

The constant pressure tightening around me.

The misalignment humming under my skin.

The erosion of my confidence.

The resentment I felt toward the rules, the pace, the expectation to be grateful for overwork.

The way my nervous system lit up like a warning flare every time I opened my laptop.

Every day whispered the same quiet truth:

*“This isn’t working — not for me, not for them.”*

So when the meeting finally came, I felt the truth land in me like something already familiar.

A quiet ending to a job I had been slowly dying inside since my 30-day review. That meant sixty more working days of trying to contort myself into a role I no longer had the internal scaffolding to sustain.

The expectations were unclear.  
The support was inconsistent.  
The psychological safety wasn't there.

And the alignment — the intuitive resonance I always try to feel before I commit — was missing from the very beginning.

But like every Good Girl before me, I tried anyway.

I tried harder.  
Softened my instincts.  
Quieted my dissent.  
Overrode my body's alarms.  
Forced myself to "be grateful."  
Pretended my confidence wasn't trembling in my hands.

Because Good Girls don't quit.  
Good Girls don't disappoint.  
Good Girls don't say, "This isn't working for me."

Good Girls keep performing even when the nervous system is begging for mercy, long after the performance is harming them.

So I stayed the course — even after I felt the ground slipping beneath me.

## **The Quiet Reconstruction of a Nervous System**

What no one at work knew was that behind the scenes, another version of me was emerging.

I was quietly — intentionally, though not fully aware of it — rebuilding my life from the ground up:

- I was attending **Dialectical Behavioural Therapy, or DBT** — learning emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and skills that finally matched the severity of the life I'd been living — and that taught me how to exit survival mode.
- I was learning to **regulate my nervous system and hormones** — learning techniques like mindfulness, grounding, intentional breathing, and — for the first time — how to listen to my body instead of override it.
- I was **healing my relationship with my body** — not through punishment, but through eating intentionally, sustainable movement, cutting out alcohol and reducing inflammation after years of chaos.
- I was **simplifying** my home, my routines, my expectations of myself.
- I was **listening to my intuition** again, the voice I had ignored in my marriage, in motherhood, and in my career.

In private, I was becoming a woman with boundaries, clarity, self-respect, and voice.

In public, I was still the over-functioning Good Girl caught in a role that was no longer mine.

The two identities could not coexist forever — and eventually, one had to end.

### **The Injustice That Realigned Everything**

Of course, I did feel that I wasn't treated fairly. After all, my manager (and HR) did know about the breakdown, depression/anxiety, looming ADHD diagnosis, my husband's betrayal and our financial strain.

You would think they would have offered me something to compensate, like, employment security or something. But no.

So, was it really "fair"?

No.

But life rarely is.

The truth sits somewhere between injustice and misalignment:

*It wasn't right for me, and I wasn't right for them.*

That doesn't mean I lacked competence.

It doesn't mean I failed.

It doesn't mean I wasn't capable of the role.

It means the conditions weren't conducive to my success — emotionally, structurally, or psychologically.

It means my nervous system was already shattered (and in the process of rebuilding) from everything happening

outside the walls of that workplace.

It means I was trying to grow a garden in soil that was never meant to sustain me.

And being fired didn't expose some hidden flaw.

Something finally clicked, and exposed the truth I had been previously too scared, or too overwhelmed to admit: *I had completely outgrown the Good Girl version of myself that chose jobs based on stability, predictability, and approval.*

### **How Getting Fired... Set Me Free**

There's a strange silence around women being fired — especially women like me.

Women who are used to being praised.  
Women who apologize before they assert.

Women who ride themselves on being reliable, agreeable, competent, steady.

Good Girls aren't supposed to get fired. It disrupts the identity we've curated.

So the shame isn't about the job loss.  
It's about what it means.  
Or what we're afraid it means.

For me, it felt like a crack in the identity I'd spent my whole life upholding — the identity built on effort, achievement, and being seen as "good."

But here's the part people don't talk about:

Sometimes losing the "Good Girl" role is what finally frees the woman within.

Sometimes the structure collapses because you were never meant to keep living inside it.

**Sometimes being fired is the universe removing you from the room you were too afraid to leave.**

### **The End of Performing, the Start of Becoming**

Walking out that day, I didn't feel like failure.

It felt like a door shutting behind me with a quiet click — and another door opening a crack, somewhere I couldn't see yet.

It felt like an ending of an identity I no longer wanted to carry.

It felt like the first honest pause I'd had in years. A pause I would never have taken on my own.

And underneath the fear, embarrassment and disbelief, there was something else rising:

### **Possibility.**

Because once the Good Girl loses the job she clung to for safety, she is forced to confront the questions she's been avoiding:

*Who am I?*

*What if approval was no longer the currency I lived by?*

*What do I actually want?*

And

*What would I love to do with my one life here on Earth?*

I didn't have the answers yet.

But the unraveling — the one that began in my marriage and culminated in this firing — wasn't destroying me.

It was stripping away everything I was never meant to keep.

It was leaving me with only the essential:

**A woman who was finally going to build a life that fit.**

# Healing Mantras

“I spent years becoming who they wanted. Now I am becoming who I am.”

“My body knows when something isn't mine. I'm finally listening.”

“I am allowed to outgrow the life I built to survive.”

@ G O O D G I R L D E T O X

## PART B: THE MIND OF A GOOD GIRL COMING TO TERMS WITH HER LIFE

There is a particular kind of psychological earthquake that happens inside women who were raised to be “good.”

Not loud.

Not dramatic.

Not sudden.

A quiet, but deafening, realization.

A realization that is not about the job, the partner, the identity, or the moment —  
but about the years spent performing as a self that was never fully hers.

Good Girls don't shatter all at once.

They erode.

Slowly.

Professionally.

Politely.

And then one day, their nervous system refuses to participate any longer.

## **Why the Good Girl Identity Crumbles Under Pressure**

The Good Girl template is simple and suffocating:

- be agreeable
- be competent
- be reliable
- be impressive
- be grateful
- be selfless
- be calm
- be accommodating

This identity earns praise in childhood.

It wins approval in school.

It makes her promotable at work.

It keeps relationships “stable.”

But psychologically, it is fragile because:

- her worth is external
- her safety depends on approval
- her nervous system is trained to override its own signals

So when life throws multiple stressors at once — chronic stress, burnout, emotional load, financial pressure, workplace misalignment, identity loss — and yes, for some women, postpartum physiology or relationship breakdown — the system collapses.

Not because she is weak.

But because she was conditioned to never stop.

The Good Girl identity only functions when life is manageable.

It collapses the moment life becomes real.

## **The Science Behind The Good Girl's Shame & Guilt Spirals**

Shame and guilt are not moral verdicts — they can function as *neurobiological alarms*.

**Shame = “I am bad.” (threat to belonging)**

**Guilt = “I did something bad.” (threat to identity)**

The Good Girl feels both intensely because her entire sense of self rests on doing things “right.”

So when something goes wrong — a mistake, a misalignment, a performance review, a firing — it does not land as an isolated event.

It lands as:

*“I am the problem.”*

Psychologically, this triggers:

- dorsal vagal shutdown (numbness, paralysis, brain fog, emotional collapse)
- sympathetic activation (panic, rumination, hypervigilance)
- social fawning (over-explaining, apologizing, people-pleasing)
- identity fragmentation (“Who am I if I’m not good anymore?”)

This is why so many competent, capable women fall apart quietly:

The shame isn't from the event.  
It's from the meaning attached to it.

## **Why Releasing Judgment Is the First Step Toward Regulation**

Before a woman can regulate her nervous system, she must stop punishing herself for having one.

Good Girls are fluent in self-judgment because, once upon a time, judgment kept them safe:

- If I judge myself first, no one else can surprise me with their judgements.
- If I'm extra hard on myself, maybe I won't disappoint anyone.
- If I stay ahead of criticism, I'll stay connected.

But judgment is not truth.  
It is not a verdict.  
It is only a thought.

And thoughts gain power only when we mistake them for reality.

Most of a woman's suffering does not come from the experience itself.  
It comes from the sentence she attaches to it:

*"I failed."*

*"I should have handled that better."*

*"Why can't I keep up?"*

Or the classic (one that hits home):  
*“What the heck is wrong with me?”*

But the moment she realizes **judgment is optional**, something profound shifts:

She can feel overwhelmed without deciding she is failing.  
She can be imperfect without deciding she is unworthy.  
She can break down without deciding she is broken.

**Judgment constricts the nervous system.  
Curiosity opens it.**

Sovereignty begins here —  
not when she becomes strong,  
but when she stops making her struggle a moral issue.

### **Curiosity & Neutrality: The Foundation of Healing**

Once judgment softens, the body finally has permission to recalibrate.

Because no coping skill — not mindfulness, not deep breathing, not a DBT worksheet — can work if the woman using it is silently telling herself she shouldn't need help.

Nervous-system regulation begins with neutrality:

- “This is what my body is experiencing.”
- “This is information, not identity.”
- “Nothing is wrong with me — something is happening inside of me that's telling me I need change.”

When she stops catastrophizing her feelings, she can finally feel them — and once she can feel them, she can respond instead of react.

This is where DBT becomes transformative:

- mindfulness grounds her in the present
- distress tolerance stabilizes her in crisis
- emotional regulation shifts her internal state
- interpersonal effectiveness helps her speak without self-abandoning

Together, they create a psychological scaffold strong enough to rebuild a life.

### **When the Self You Built No Longer Fits**

Eventually, a Good Girl trying to become her own woman reaches a moment of piercing clarity:

*“The self I constructed is no longer the self I want to live in.”*

She sees:

- the job she chose for stability now suffocates her
- the identity she built for approval no longer nourishes her
- the childhood patterns she inherited are outdated
- the coping strategies that protected her now limit her
- the relationships that validated her old self cannot sustain her new one

This is identity dissonance — the psychological cracking open that occurs when the Good Girl scaffolding collapses under its own weight.

Many women panic here.  
But this moment is not the end.  
It is an exit ramp.

Postpartum may accelerate this reckoning.  
Relationship breakdown may illuminate it.  
Career loss may ignite it.

But none of those things cause the identity shift.  
They simply remove the scaffolding.

The woman beneath was always there.

### **How the Sovereign Self Emerges**

The sovereign woman is not reborn from confidence.  
She is reborn from clarity.

Clarity that:

- she no longer needs to earn her worth
- she no longer owes her life to other people's expectations
- her nervous system deserves regulation, not denial
- her body is a compass, not an inconvenience
- she has permission to pivot
- she can choose ease without explaining it
- she can choose alignment over approval
- she can choose herself

The sovereign woman begins where the Good Girl ends:

Not by asking,  
*"What will they think?"*  
but by asking,  
*"What do I need?"*

Because once she begins listening to her internal world  
(her body, her intuition, her limits, her desires) — then

her external world must recalibrate.

This isn't rebellion.

It is reclamation.

### **The Truth About the Good Girl: She's Not "Good" or "Bad" — She's Becoming**

Recognizing yourself as a Good Girl does not break you.  
It reveals you.

It reveals what is no longer aligned, sustainable, or true.

It reveals the gap between:

the self you performed  
and  
the self you are becoming.

And in that gap —  
in the grief, the fear, the unraveling, the uncertainty —  
a woman rises.

Not as the Good Girl.  
But as the Sovereign Woman —  
the one who chooses based on what supports her life, her  
health, her peace...  
and trusts that everything else will recalibrate  
accordingly.

"Good" and "bad" were categories you inherited.  
They were never true, and they were never your destiny.

You are not here on this earth to be pleasing or palatable  
to others.

You are here to be true to yourself and bring your gifts to the world.

So release the girl who lived for approval.  
Make space for the woman who lives for herself.

Because the rebuild does not begin with confidence.  
It begins with your permission to be yourself.

Say it with me:

***“I release the girl who lived for approval.  
I rise as the woman who lives for herself.”***



# 7 CHAPTER

## THE SOVEREIGN WOMAN'S RETURN TO SELF

# THE SOVEREIGN REBUILD

There is a moment after the unraveling where the dust settles — it's not dramatic or ceremonial, but immensely calm.

It is the moment a woman looks at her life and realizes:  
*"Everything I thought would break me has actually brought me back to myself."*

Not back to the Good Girl self.

Not back to the performing self.

Not back to the self she constructed to stay safe, liked, or chosen.

But back to the expansive, intuitive, dreamer self she had been overriding for years.

This chapter of life is about clarity —  
the clarity that comes once the noise stops, once the roles release, once the survival version of you finally sets down her armour.

## **A Woman After the Reckoning**

When the crises end — whether the crisis was career, relationship, identity, motherhood, burnout, or a combination of all — a woman is left with something she hasn't had in a long time:

### **Access.**

Access to her inner world.

Access to her real needs.

Access to her boundaries, her exhaustion, her truth.  
Access to the wisdom her nervous system had been  
whispering long before she had the capacity to hear it.

This is the beginning of sovereign living.  
Not necessarily the dramatic or triumphant rise, but the  
honest one.

Because sovereignty doesn't begin when a woman feels  
powerful.

It begins when she feels present and centered in her own  
life.

### **What Actually Changes When the Good Girl Falls Away**

Here's what no one tells you:

When the Good Girl identity dissolves, the world doesn't  
fall apart —  
the illusions do.

Illusions about:

- who you “must” be
- what you “owe” people
- how much you have to tolerate
- the pace you must operate at
- the roles you're supposed to inhabit
- the identity that once kept you safe but also kept you  
small

What remains is the simple, almost startling realization:

**You can build a life that fits your nervous system, not  
one you must perform through.**

This is the foundation of your return to self.

## **The Method Behind the Rebuild (Without the Clichés)**

Here is the truth:

You do not rebuild through willpower, aesthetic routines, or motivational slogans.

Women rebuild through developing a psychological **foundation** (*not scaffolding*) that supports real identity discovery.

That foundation includes:

### **1. Nervous System Literacy**

Using mindfulness to notice your activation patterns. Understanding when and why you freeze, fawn, fight, flee, overfunction, or dissociate.

### **2. Emotional Regulation**

Developing skills that can meet the actual intensity of life — and not just “thinking” your way out of pain (sorry CBT, but there’s a few holes).

This often includes learning evidence-based tools (like DBT) that help you understand your emotional patterns, recognize what activates them, and respond in ways that reduce suffering rather than reinforce it.

Over time, this becomes less about fixing yourself and more about building a trustworthy relationship with your intuition.

### **3. Pattern Interruptions**

Gently - but intentionally - disrupting the reactions, habits, and autopilot responses that once kept the Good Girl safe.

This is the work of noticing when old strategies arise — people-pleasing, over-functioning, self-silencing — and choosing something different, even when it feels unfamiliar.

Not rejection of who you were, but recognition that those patterns no longer serve who you are becoming.

### **4. Setting Internal Boundaries**

Not just saying “no” to others,  
but saying “*not anymore*” to your old self.  
None of this is glamorous.  
But it is transformative.

### **5. Values-Based Identity Reconstruction**

Rebuilding your life around who you are —  
not who you were told to be.

### **6. Dreams & Desire Awareness**

Learning to want things for yourself again —  
without shame, without justification, without minimizing.

This is the work that must continue beyond this book.

## **The Real Return to Self (Where You Rule)**

Your sovereign self does not ask,  
*“Am I doing enough?”*

She asks,  
*“Is this enough for me?”*

And things that are small and keep her small will *not* be enough.

And that’s amazing.

Your sovereign self does not chase approval.  
She seeks alignment.

Your sovereign self does not collapse in the face of imperfection.  
She meets it with neutrality.

And most importantly—

Your sovereign self is not a future version of you.  
She is the one who has been trying to surface for years.

All you are doing now is removing what blocked her.

## **My Closing Notes to the Woman Reading This**

By now, I hope you realize that you do not need to have lost your job or career, a relationship, or have had a falling out with your parents in order to see yourself in me.

You do not have to have completely fallen apart or have had your entire identity collapse beneath you.

Sure, that's my story, and that's what it took for me to realize just how misaligned I truly was.

You, however, might just need to recognize some unhelpful patterns in your life in order to move forward. If I can catch you before the collapse, before you've come undone, that is my purpose.

If this is you, then you can rebuild from a foundation rather than starting from scratch – with a supportive partner or a healthy credit score, maybe.

Or, you might be just like me, too. In that case, I hope I can give you some hope.

And that starts with truth...

You thought being a Good Girl made you “worthy.” But the truth is, we're a dime a dozen.

What's truly rare, and worth more than I may be able to express, is becoming a Sovereign Woman who lives by her own rules, expectations, and roles she sets for herself.

Not someone who dotes on others to keep the peace.

You deserve peace regardless of what anyone else in your life is thinking or doing, and definitely not at the expense of anyone else's thinking or doing.

It's you, mama. You are the only one who can bring yourself the peace you desperately need.

Either way, what I want to bring home is:

You do not need to become someone else after this book.  
In truth, you are not starting over as someone new.

You are returning.

Returning to instinct.

Returning to clarity.

Returning to listening to your body's intelligence.

Returning to the life that fits you, not the life you felt obligated to perform.

This is not the end of your story, and you start a new one.  
This is the part where you begin writing it with intention.

No mantra repeated here — just one new truth:

**You are allowed to become a woman your past self would not yet recognize.**

That is what growth is.

That is what returning to yourself feels like.

Your sovereign life begins when you let fear wash away,  
and when you choose it.

And you just did.

# Healing Mantras

“I choose a life that fits both  
me and my nervous system:  
my clarity is enough to guide  
me.”

“To be myself, I don’t need to  
ask for permission, approval OR  
forgiveness.”

“Do not ask if yourself if you  
are worthy of your dreams; but  
if they are worthy of YOU.”

@ G O O D G I R L D E T O X



# 8 CHAPTER

## THE SOVEREIGN WOMAN'S PATH FORWARD

# PART A: WHERE I AM NOW

I want to be clear about something before you close this book:

I am not “healed.”

I am not finished.

I am not a perfect example of anything.

I am a former Good Girl — and still very much a work in progress.

As I write this, my life looks nothing like the one I spent years carefully building. In a short span of time, I left a marriage that no longer supported who I was becoming, lost a career I had devoted my adult life to, and watched structures I once relied on fall away faster than I could replace them.

And still — this is the most honest season of my life.

I am actively healing.

I am still making mistakes I don't want to make.

I still get dysregulated.

I still react instead of respond sometimes.

I still bump up against old patterns — especially with the people who raised me and the relationships that trigger and stretch my nervous system.

But I no longer mistake imperfection for failure.

I start each day now from a different place:

my body,  
my nervous system,  
my truths,  
my longing.

That alone has changed everything.

This book was never meant to present me as someone who “figured it all out.”

It was meant to tell the truth — especially for the women who feel like they’ve tried everything and still feel stuck.

For the ones who invested years in therapy, “balancing” diets, protocols, programs, self-help books, and strategies — only to realize that stress, shame, and self-abandonment were *still* running the show.

I am not speaking ill of these methods; they work for some people. Perhaps a lot of people. They didn’t exactly work for me.

What I wanted — and what I hope you felt here — is something different:

*A holistic, integrated understanding of how a woman’s chronic stress impacts the mental, emotional, and physical self, and how returning to yourself is not a dramatic overhaul, but a slow, compassionate process of listening again.*

Not fixing.  
Not forcing.  
Listening.

Not everyone who reads this book is ready — or needs — a total life transformation.

And that's okay.

But for the women who are ready...

And for the women who want to be ready but don't yet trust themselves...

This is where it begins.

With awareness.

With nervous system safety.

With releasing the belief that you have to earn rest, worth, or alignment.

With learning how to come home to yourself — gently, honestly, and at your own pace.

I am walking this path with you.

Still learning.

Still choosing.

Still becoming.

And if you decide to keep going — slowly or boldly — I'll be here.

Not ahead of you.

Beside you. 🌱

# PART B: AN INVITATION TO CHANGE & TRANSFORMATION

This book is the foundation — not the finish line.

Over the coming months, I'll be expanding this work into a few gentle and accessible ways to go deeper, at your own pace:

- **Free monthly Clarity Workshop(s)**

These are live, low-pressure spaces to explore who you were before your Good Girl patterns, and where you would like to go in your journey to rebuilding your true identity, wants, needs, hopes and dreams.

No fixing. No forced participation. Just clarity and reconnection with yourself.

- **A guided course / workshop series (coming soon)**

This will walk through the exact frameworks and practices I've used — and continue to use — to move from Good Girl conditioning into sovereignty, self-trust, and embodied choice.

Think: neuropsychology + nervous system work + identity rebuilding — without overwhelm.

*If you'd like to be notified when workshops open, courses launch, or new resources become available, you can join my email list at:*

👉 **GG DETOX/OPT-IN**

This list is not about hustle or pressure.  
It's simply a place to stay connected — and to receive support when you're interested or ready for it.

And if you never sign up?  
You still did something powerful by reading this book.

You listened.  
You noticed yourself.  
You began.

That counts.

You're welcome to move slowly here. This work isn't going anywhere.

But, if you feel ready and that you'd benefit from coaching support as you navigate the next chapter of your life, I'm offering readers of this book a free, private strategy session.

This is not a sales call.  
There is no obligation to continue.

It's simply a space to:

- talk through where you are
- understand what's actually keeping you stuck
- explore what support (not pressure) could look like for you

Think of it as a re-orientation — not a commitment.

If that feels supportive, or if you have any questions, you can always reach me at:

**[hello@coachmilaniacobelli.com](mailto:hello@coachmilaniacobelli.com)**

(And if now isn't the time, that's okay too. The most important thing is that you keep choosing yourself — in whatever way feels right).

*With care,*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Milania Cobelli". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of "M" being particularly large and decorative.

Milania Cobelli  
*The Good Girl Detox Nurse*



Milania Cobelli

TRANSFORMATIONAL COACH

Are you ready for  
transformation?

LET'S GET IN TOUCH!

AS A BELOVED READER OF THIS E-BOOK, I INVITE YOU TO ATTEND A **FREE CLARITY WORKSHOP AND STRATEGY SESSION** TO HELP YOU GAIN CLARITY ON WHERE YOU ARE, FIND WHERE YOU WANT TO GO, AND THE FIRST STEPS TO HOW WE CAN GET YOU STARTED.

Email me for more info on free  
workshops & sessions!

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