

Good County

by E.T. Anderson

ACT I

SCENE I - "Red Road Signs"

Good County Canyon - Day

HUSBAND and WIFE drive down a canyon in a convertible. HUSBAND drives.

WIFE: That sign said "Buckle Up."

HUSBAND: Well the good people of this good county want us to be safe.

WIFE: Does that mean that canyons without a sign that says "Buckle Up" are bad counties with bad people?

HUSBAND: Well, no. No, I wouldn't say that.

WIFE: Then why'd this county put up that sign?

HUSBAND: Maybe there's no real reason. Maybe some unknown and unknowable representative from this fine county is a sweet man who eats sweet rolls each morning and is quite round and wanted to spread a message of safety and love without relying on overly graphic or verbose vernacular.

WIFE: What county are we in again?

HUSBAND: Good County.

WIFE: Good?

HUSBAND: County. Yes.

WIFE: Strange name for a county.

HUSBAND: I think it suits them.

The couple passes another “Buckle Up” sign.

WIFE: There’s another one!

HUSBAND: Dear, will you give it a rest?

WIFE: “Buckle Up.” It’s written like a command.

HUSBAND: All American road signs are.

WIFE: Even if your theory about the unknown and unknowable representative is true, I don’t think it’s responsible for a county to waste dollars on signs without explanations.

HUSBAND: Maybe. Unless, of course, the county is so good they don’t need any other signs. Perhaps the crime rate is so low in Good County that they need no J-walking signs, or roadwork signs, or Neighborhood Watch signs, or even too many Stop signs, and these “Buckle Up” signs are the only signs they can think of. The signs seem perfectly benevolent to me. They bring me comfort. Can we please drop it?

WIFE: Okay, I’ll drop it.
(continued)
I wished our radio worked.

HUSBAND: I’ll have Gilbert look at—

The couple passes another sign.

WIFE: Look at that sign! “Trench in Road Ahead. Use Caution.”

HUSBAND: Dear, please don't shout: you've startled me.

WIFE: What could that sign even mean?

HUSBAND: I'm sure it's construction terminology. Or a trench
their digging on the side of the road for drainage.
They get quite a bit of rain in Good County this time of year.

WIFE: But it said "Trench IN Road." You're describing
something next to the road.

HUSBAND: Semantics!

WIFE: I'm not sure I'm as ready as you are to absolve
Good County of their signs. That sign is plain
bad. All I have now is more questions. Either
that sign means what it says or it doesn't, but
I'm prepared for neither situation because
I'm only thinking about the sign. Should I be
expecting World War style trenches? How can
we be cautious drivers with distracting road
signs like that?

HUSBAND: Honey, I'll just maintain a demeanor of general
alertness. Would that put your worries away?

WIFE: Oh, pooey. I'm not doubting your ability to
drive. You've done a great job so far. But what
about drivers less experienced? What if they
can't stop focusing on these poorly worded signs
the way I can't?

HUSBAND: Then I suppose they'd be in a pickle.

WIFE: Oh my word.

HUSBAND: And then Good County would have new kinds
of signs to put up when one of these "thinkers"
spends too much time thinking and not driving
and ends up in a wreck.

WIFE: That's so callous.

HUSBAND: I'm sorry. I just don't think this is as big of a deal as you're making it. We've been driving for a long time—perhaps you're feeling tired. We'll stop and stretch our legs at the next gas station.

The couple passes another sign.

WIFE: Oh my god!

HUSBAND: Jesus! You can't yell—

WIFE: “Tank X-ING Ahead. Pass With Care.”

HUSBAND: We're fine—

WIFE: We're entering an active warzone! The upcoming trench in the road probably has soldiers!

HUSBAND: No, no, calm down. Good County hasn't been at war since the French and Indian War. We're perfectly safe.

WIFE: How do you know that? How are you so calm?

HUSBAND: The French and Indian war is over dear. Maybe that sign is leftover. There are simply no enemies Good County has left to fight. Certainly no more Indians.

WIFE: They didn't have tanks in the French and Indian War and they certainly didn't have aluminum road signs. And their preferred nomenclature is Native American.

HUSBAND: White Academia you mean.

WIFE: What?

HUSBAND: White Academia prefers Native American. Ask any Indian on any reservation. Most will tell you they identify as Indian. White Academia is uncomfortable with this fact.

WIFE: Whatever! We're still moving fifty miles per hour in a metal machine toward exploding weaponry and you're more interested in the liberal arts!

HUSBAND: Good County has no reason to put us in danger. We will be fine. Maybe they're not even referencing the tanks you're thinking of. Maybe they're meaning a highly specialized tractor or slang for an animal.

WIFE: I can't believe you're telling me a tank is not actually a tank.

HUSBAND: I know that in small counties like this language can become highly regionalized. For all we know they might barely speak recognizable English. Maybe this is a scenario like Holland's colonization of South Africa. Maybe the good people of Good County speak "English" like the Afrikaners speak "Dutch": keeping the general pronunciation and sentence structure of a language but swapping words until the meaning of their vocabulary becomes something else entirely. To Good County, "Tank" could mean "bulldozer" and "Buckle Up" might mean "No Drowsy Driving." Perhaps that explains your confusion with the road signs so far.

A distant gunshot is heard.

WIFE: We are going to die.

HUSBAND: Hunters, dear! Hunters. This is the perfect time of year to hunt in Good County.

An explosion is heard.

WIFE: Jesus Christ!

HUSBAND: Miners! Dynamite, my dear!

WIFE: Why do you insist on calling me crazy?

HUSBAND: Recreation and business does not simply stop because you and I are going for a long drive. What would you have me do? Pull over? Stop the car? Make myself a target in the highly unlikely scenario that Good County is an active warzone? Turn around on this narrow two lane highway, head back toward the potentially advancing enemy in the world where Good County is under attack? I'm sorry, dear. There's not much else for me to do. I can't play into this fantasy for my own wellbeing, as well as yours. You must be wrong, therefore you are.

A pause.

WIFE: An acknowledgement would have been nice.

The car comes around a turn and approaches the end of the canyon.

HUSBAND: And look here, we're almost out of the canyon dear. We're well on our way to civilization and leaving Good County Canyon behind. We can stop fretting over the technically possible but highly unlikely mythology of these good people in this good canyon in this Good County. Besides your reactions to these signs, it truly has been a good, green drive.

The car exits the canyon.