

Becoming The Perfect Student



Nick Lorance



A "Young Adult Tv" Novel



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For information address
Reluctant Press
P.O. Box 5829
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413
USA

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

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Becoming The Perfect Student

By Nick Lorange

The Applicant

I looked toward the register, where the old man was standing. He had looked up when I came in, pretty much ignoring me, but as I wandered the store, he started watching. I walked with my hands behind my back, looking at the candy aisle, the chip aisle, the nuts and jerky aisle.

All good stuff to shoplift. If I *meant* to shoplift.

The chime on the door went off, Mitch and Danny had come in, headed toward the back of Aisle One, where there were 12-packs of beer. I thrust my hand into my pocket, walking fast toward the door. The old man turned back, saw me walking nonchalantly toward the door. “Stop, thief!”

I kept walking. I was past him as he charged around the counter to chase me. Mitch and Danny grabbed a 12-pack each, and turned toward the door as I walked out and turned left. Great, we'd have beer tonight!

I was three paces from the door when the old man grabbed me. "Turn out your pocket!"

I turned, looking at him mildly. "You may think I have shoplifted, sir. But unless I attempt to flee, you have no right to grab me. Legally, you're committing an assault and I can sue you for that."

He let me go. "Turn out your pocket."

I pulled my hand out, drawing the pocket out to show . . . nothing.

I had him cold. I would have felt victorious if Danny hadn't shouted, "Run, Brian!"

I started to bolt, but he grabbed me again. He may have been old, but he was strong. He dragged me in, keeping a grip on my shirt near the neck. He dialed the police. I sighed. *Danny, you stupid fuck!*

Jessica Mackenzie sighed as she opened the door, pointing Brian toward his room. She had just returned from the police station. When she had heard what happened, she had numbly pulled a twenty, the last twenty, from her wallet. The store owner had agreed to drop the charges but she had finally reached her wits' end.

Ever since her husband James died, Brian had gotten more and more out of control. He had skipped

so much school in the last year and a half that she was worried that he might not even graduate, though it didn't bother him! Having struggled to earn a GED because she failed to graduate, she knew what he faced first hand. But like any kid, he assumed he was smarter than his mother.

She poured a cup of tea, sitting at the desk where her desk top computer sat. She was just glad he hadn't sunk so low as to steal from her. Yet. She brought up her email. Maybe she had gotten an answer back about work.

PROBLEMS WITH YOUR SON? PERHAPS WE CAN HELP

She stared at the email, then looked at the time. It had been sent just as she was leaving the police station. With trepidation, she clicked the email, and read it. Yes, this might help Brian to learn to be more responsible. She brought up the reply screen, and began to type.

The Island

The woman at the desk read the file before her, making a notation, then set it in the outbox. A grandfather clock ticking in the corner was the only sound. There was a hesitant knock, the door opened a little. "Ma'am, the new evaluation requests." The woman at the desk held up her hand, the girl who had spoken walked across the room to hand her the files. She didn't move furtively, or scurry to complete the task in a hurry; both were grounds for punishment. She moved with a stately glide instead.

"Tea, please."

“Yes, Headmistress.” The girl curtseyed, and hurried out, returning with a silver tea service. She poured, dropped two cubes of sugar into the tea, stirred it, then set the cup on the desk. “Will there be anything else, Headmistress?”

“That will be all. Nancy. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, Headmistress.” Another curtsey, and she left the room.

The headmistress allowed a small smile, then opened the first file. Brian MacKenzie, seventeen years old. Eighteen in . . . one month. She remembered the mother’s plaintive reply. Yes, this one would do well.

“Really, Jessica, it’s for the best,” Elizabeth Stanhope said. She was a beautiful woman in a designer suit with the air of the perfect secretary.

Jessica MacKenzie sat, hands clasped tightly. She had answered the e-mail, but hadn’t expected such a quick, personal, response. Then two days later Elizabeth had called, suggesting a quiet dinner meeting. Jessica hadn’t been sure at first what they were offering but the restaurant was a quiet top end place. Frankly if she had been entering it normally, it would have been as a waitress.

Elizabeth was smart, spoke eloquently, and identified herself as a Psychological Nurse Practitioner assigned as an evaluator for the Academy. The brochure was from Le Brouillard prep school, and she thought even if they could make any changes in her son, she’d never be able to afford it.

Elizabeth had waved off such foolish concerns. “The General started this school not long after the Second World War because of the shocking attitudes of the young in France then. Their youth went through the same sort of ‘I am most important’ phase at that time; he knew his country would fall from grace if nothing was done. His will left his family fortune to build and fund the Academy. There is no cost to you, because we are paid from the other end.”

Elizabeth pointed at the brochure of clean cut young men walking through the halls of a school, running on a track, studying in classrooms, swimming on a beach that looked like some tropical resort.

“We are located in the South Pacific because there are several small islands in the region still owned by France and the property values are much lower than Europe or America. Which also gives us facilities beyond even the most prestigious college there.

“Our students are immersed in a full regimen of study both professional and physical training beyond what any other school can offer. You see, the youth of today think they are ready for anything, and the first thing we teach them is that it isn’t true. Unlike a mainland college anywhere else, the only way they can leave is by swimming several hundred kilometers.

“Having them unable to flee, we can convince them to study and learn, because all privileges are linked to study. If they refuse we can limit their diet to bland foods with no access to sweets. Entertainment is what we allow, not what they want. Alcohol is prohibited for any under age and delinquency is punished firmly. We even have a small boot camp-like portion at the start. The first thing we do, as would, say, the Army, is break them away from the attitudes that are holding them back from excelling. That period is only

long enough to let them know that they are not as tough, nor as smart, as they think they are.

“Once that is done, they are evaluated for what remedial schooling is needed, and put through not only that but the equivalent of a trade school aimed at their strengths. By the end of the first year, you would be surprised by the difference. We have companies around the world and top business men in those companies that use our facility as their exclusive hiring ground.”

It sounded wonderful and the fruity red wine they drank with their meal made Jessica more relaxed. She agreed to allow Elizabeth to meet and speak with Brian, and thought that would probably be the end of it.

But a week later, Elizabeth again took her to dinner. Going through a concise and very accurate appraisal of the attitudes her son displayed, the younger woman had ended with an offer to take him to the Academy starting that very weekend. But now Jessica was having second thoughts about the arrangements. She would go out, and they would pick him up while she was gone. His things would be packed and out within hours. “We have found that when a child is taken away by us, they resist and cling to their parent like preschool children going to school for the first time. They believe that if they can re-invoke that young child attitude, that you will relent. It is easier on both of you this way.”

“I’m not sure, Elizabeth,” Jessica said softly. “I feel like I’m betraying him somehow.”

Elizabeth sighed. “Jessica, in the last week you and I have studied the conversations I have had with Brian. He is argumentative, so sure of his rectitude. He is the perfect exemplar of what they call the X

Generation; why should he exert himself when the world will give him what he wants in life unasked?" Her hand rested gently on the older woman's. "We both know that isn't true. Life gives you nothing you do not work for, or earn because you failed to work. Unless you are willing to be a criminal, all his attitude will get him is a place on the street, or in jail; because not even the food service industry would put up with it for any length of time.

"Our school was founded with that in mind. Our students are forced into an environment where they must strive or fail miserably; and let me tell you, we have yet to have a failure. But the first step is to remove them from the old environment."

"You think I-"

"Nonsense," Elizabeth corrected her. "When a child goes bad, a good parent always wonders what *they* did wrong. But a parent is not the only outside source affecting them. There are friends, the stupidity of the schools where they accept social promotion to keep a failing student with their classmates to the child's detriment. Entertainment from television to movies, to music that reinforces their bad habits, even advertising! We take these problem students away from all that; make them stand on their own. Instead of letting them drift, we make them swim."

"But if I explain . . ."

"Explain what? That Brian is a self-centered jerk that has been taught by society that he is perfect only because of where he was born?" Elizabeth asked. "That society has taught him one thing and the world will teach him something else again when he actually enters the marketplace? That society places the onus of his failure not where it belongs, on his own unwillingness to succeed, but on your shoulders, Eliza-

beth. And that society is wrong.” Elizabeth touched the woman’s hand again.

“Let him go, Jessica. Let him sink or swim on his own merit. We will make him see the truth, and force him to grow up.”

Jessica sighed, nodding. “So what do I do?”

Elizabeth pulled out the contract. “As his legal guardian, you sign here.”

I awoke confused. I could hear the howl of jet engines ahead of me. I opened my eyes and looked at the blank metal wall ahead of me. There was a doorway and an alcove that looked like a workspace for a stewardess.

How had I come to be here? Mom had brought some young woman named Elizabeth home one night. She was attractive but seemed a bit cold. For a week she had almost lived with us; at the house before I even left for school, hanging around me constantly, and every time we met during that week she had asked questions. I wasn’t sure what the hell was going on; maybe the state paid for live-in shrinks or something, because if we weren’t talking, she was watching me.

The last day she told mom I would ‘do nicely’, whatever the hell that meant.

Mom was so dumb. She never noticed that I had been slipping drinks from the liquor cabinet for over a year. Just watch whatever bottle she was drinking from and slip a shot out of it. She took a shot of Scotch. When she left to go to the store, I got a shot of

it, took it to my room, and chugged it. That was the last thing I remembered.

There was a roaring in my ears. I was sitting in an airline-style couch and cuffs like they use for prisoners in transit bound my hands and feet. But it wasn't any kind of jet I had ever seen before. Ahead of me on the left I could see out a port where four jet engines howled. The water looked awful close though. I could feel some kind of flat linked necklace on my neck.

"Awake, I see." My head turned, and Elizabeth smiled down at me. "Thirsty?" I nodded. She went to the alcove, returning with a can and a clear plastic cup. The juice was something I had never tasted, tart and refreshing. "Almost there."

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"The Island," Elizabeth replied.

"Why are we so low?"

"Because this is not a plane. It is an ekranoplan; a Wing in Ground Effect aircraft." She motioned. "One hundred meters long, top speed of four hundred knots, flying only seventy feet above the water. The Soviets built them for rapid deployment of troops. It would carry a battalion of assault troops and all their gear over a thousand kilometers distance." She sat in the lounge chair beside me. "But today, just us and some cargo."

"Why am I here?" I asked.

She merely smiled, then looked up as the engine note changed. "We're almost there." She stood, walking forward as the vehicle slowed. The water approached, then the hull slapped into it. The ship slid along like a pat of butter on a hot skillet, turning to

face toward an island. I only saw part of it. The ship settled, rolling as the waves slapped it. I stared as the trees drew closer, then climbed as the ship went up the ramp.

The scenery turned as the craft moved forward and I watched the trees. A man came down from the flight deck, unlocking the clip that anchored me in my seat. I wanted to growl. The man snatched me up onto my feet, slipping a leash through the handcuffs. Elizabeth came down, and the man handed her the leash. She nodded.

“Walk,” Elizabeth ordered. I wanted to resist but I saw the leash and the innocuous box attached to it. I followed her out of the ship onto the pad. A limo pulled up and Elizabeth dragged me into the vehicle. We sat waiting as the limo took us deeper. The island was lush and beautiful. The two villages we went through were peopled by black people. This meant we were in the Melanesian islands; New Guinea and those near it. Or the Caribbean.

The limo stopped at a mansion and I was dragged out. It looked like any mansion from the Deep South of America to those owned by the despots of South America. Two maids in blue uniforms met us. “Take him to preparation. I have to report.”

“At once, Mistress.” The blonde one took the leash. “If you will follow me please?” she said.

“Now wait a-” My diatribe ended as the woman tapped the button. The necklace I had noticed shocked me, the blast of electric energy dropping me to my knees.

“All students will obey direction from any school personnel on the pain of punishment,” the blonde re-

cited. “Now get up and walk or we will give you further punishment.”

I staggered to my feet and the women escorted me into the building. They took me down into what had to be a basement. There the two flankers unlocked my manacles, anchoring my arms, then my legs, to the wall.

The girls went to a closet, opening it. “School uniform,” one commented.

Her associate looked at me. “For how long?” Then she drew down a uniform. “We will release your bonds and you will dress in this uniform. If you do not, you will be punished. But first . . .” She got a small device that looked like a gun, turning my head. “This will sting a bit.” Then she set it against the back of my neck.

Sting, my ass! It hurt like someone had shoved an icpick through my neck!

Then they worked together each unlocking the manacles on one side. “There. Get dressed, please.”

I looked at the woman holding the device, then looked at the clothing. No big; it was a shirt and pants, like any private school uniform. Her eyes tightened, her thumb hovering over that damn button. I picked them up, dressing. They didn’t look away, they didn’t giggle. They just watched me like a pair of vultures staking out a staggering donkey. I was supplied socks and loafers, then stood.

“You can remove the necklace, Beth,” the blonde said. The brunette walked around behind me, and I felt it come loose. She walked past me, putting the necklace in a jewelry box. They were freeing me. Inwardly I snarled. I wasn’t above hitting a girl!

“Come with us, please.”

“I’m-” Again the button. I felt like someone had set every nerve in my body on fire! I screamed, finding myself on my knees.

“The needle that was injected into your neck is a smaller version of the necklace, but it doesn’t shock you. Instead it transmits energy directly into your nerves. Quite painful as you can see. Now, stand up and come with us, please.”

I stood. It wasn’t over

More Puzzles

The halls were quiet. I didn’t see anyone else as we walked up to the third floor of the building. There was some noise, the sound of a keyboard in one office, a bit of classical music from another, but on the whole it was still except for the click of their heels. They came to a door marked HEADMISTRESS and took me inside. The office was small with a door in the west wall, a desk before the north-facing window with a phone, a top end computer, and some folders stacked neatly beside it; only there was no one there. The girls led me to a chair beside a coffee table.

“The Headmistress will be with you shortly. You may read a magazine, but do not leave the office,” the brunette told me. They turned and I watched their tight little asses in their short frilly skirts mince over to the door, and out, leaving me alone.

I waited 30 seconds, then stood. I ignored the other door. This was obviously a receptionist’s office, so opening the other door might put me face to face with this ‘headmistress’. I tried the door I had entered by, but it wouldn’t open. All right. I walked across to the

window and looked out over the jungle a few hundred yards away. It resisted my attempts to open it. So, no escape. Yet.

I flipped through the folders. There were ten; four with girl's names, six with men's names . . . One had my name. I opened it.

I read with growing shock. It read like a combined school record/police report/psych evaluation. I didn't have enough time to read it obviously, only skimmed it. But the last paragraphs of the psych portion I read:

"The subject is a perfect example of the American X Generation: Raised in relative affluence compared to the rest of the world, he is of the belief that he needs only relax for everything to come to him, something even the most gifted on the planet anywhere else know is not true. As such he is, in my opinion, an excellent project to work with. Now on to our primary objective; where he would work best.

"I will take them in order of their least likelihood of success:

"I think he would be a failure if placed in Category Four; while he is polite, erudite and personable, all key necessities for Category Four, it is also the one where the minimum of mental orientation is used, except for Category Four B, where it would not matter. But even there, he would still have all of his previous proclivities, and would eventually be able to weasel his way out of the situation with financial loss to the client.

"Category Three is out because he would need to effect a major change in his view of the world and buckle down to serious study to succeed. If he did, he could make a successful transition to that Category. However having dealt with him daily for a week, I think it is

unlikely that he could succeed in that attempt. He is too stubborn to accept that it is him at fault, and would resist any attempt to repair his own deficiencies.

“Category Two is possible in situations where movement is straightened to almost lock-down levels. There are clients interested in such acquisitions, however any who obtained him would have to be warned that the processing might not be complete, and he might attempt to make a break for it. Again there are clients well-placed to forestall this, however we try to deliver a perfectly compliant product, and I believe he would be substandard in this, though I have been proven wrong before.

“This leaves only Category One, our original purpose. The mental orientation is the most extreme under that regimen, and straightened conditions the norm. The clients expect their acquisitions to be resistant and seem to revel in it. He will be perfect there.”

I didn't understand. While it was nice someone thought me 'polite, erudite and personable', what did they mean by 'mental orientation'? Or 'straitened'?

There was a noise. It sounded like a moan of discomfort. I looked up but I was still alone. I heard it again, then some muffled words. It came from the other door. I walked over, leaning into it.

“Please, Headmistress. Don't-” Another moan. “I beg you, please, no!”

“Come, come, Nancy. You know the rules. And the punishment for breaking them,” another voice replied. Then there was a grunting sound mixed with keening. I bent down. The door had an old fashioned knob with a keyhole, and I knelt, looking through it.

There was a girl in a full-length dress bent forward, her hands clutching the edge of the desk she was bent over. Her skirt had been flipped up and an older woman in a full dress stood behind her, pressed close. "It's almost in," the older woman said, shoving forward with her hips. Nancy rocked forward, still whining and pleading, yet her hands stayed locked on the desk.

"It hurts," Nancy whined, her red hair in a tight bun moved as she shook her head in denial. "It's burning! Please, stop!"

"No, Nancy. You deserve this." Their hips met, and the woman rolled her hips. "Admit it. You would not keep making such stupid mistakes if you didn't want this."

"No, it was an accident!" Nancy pleaded. "I-"

"You want to get fucked. Admit it." The woman stood, pressing her hips forward. "So tight," she whispered, then she pulled back, her strap-on sliding inch-by-inch out of the pleading girl, then slammed forward, driving her into the desk with another grunt. "Admit it!" The woman began a rapid series of thrusts, each driving the girl forward.

"No," Nancy whined. "I don't like this." Yet her hands stayed on the desk edge. She moaned at each thrust, groaning as the shaft withdrew, only to slam forward again.

"Yes, you do," the woman contradicted. "Twice a week I find myself fucking you. If you didn't want this, you would stop making mistakes!" Every word was punctuated by a thrust. She stopped, the tip of the strap-on, a very realistic one from what I could see, barely in. Nancy growled, then pushed with her

arms to slide it in deeper. The woman chuckled, then slammed it home.

“To paraphrase Neil Simon, your lips say no, no. But there’s yes, yes in your panties.” She began driving the strap-on hard into the girl.

“Getting an eyeful?” a voice asked right beside my ear. My head snapped around to see Elizabeth’s face inches away. She chuckled evilly. “Punishment is supposed to be private. Sit down and leave them to it.”

I moved to the chair I had been sitting in. Elizabeth watched me go, still bent at the waist where she had been standing. Then she stood, going to the desk. “What are you doing?”

“Checking the surveillance cameras.” She replied. “There are cameras in every room of the facility. Including this one.” She watched silently for several minutes. “Naughty, naughty. I count three demerits and you’re not even registered!” She tapped a few keys, then walked around the desk. She leaned against it, and fixed that smile on me. We could both hear the girl in the next room moaning, then screaming, for the woman to fuck her harder for another fifteen minutes. Then silence. A short time later, the door opened. Nancy stopped, then blushed furiously in seeing she had an audience. She walked to the desk, primly sat, then tapped her mouse, and entered her password.

She tapped a few keys, then looked at me with fury and despair as she blushed again. Her phone beeped, and she answered. Then she hung up, shuffling through the files. “Mackenzie, come with me, please.” She stood again, walking back to the door, and opened it. I followed. Once I had stepped through, she walked to the desk, handed over the file