

HOW I DONE GOOD IN SCHOOL

By James Hanna

WHY I LIKE IT: *Guest Editor BENJAMIN SOILEAU writes: Rake in training, Toby Dawes is just a farm boy. Outside of the brothel where he became a man, thanks to a generous birthday gift from his father, nobody's heard of him yet since he's not made much of an impression. Transitioning from his boyhood at the brothel is Toby's best accomplishment, so says he, although I do believe he's being hard on himself considering his rat killing abilities, something he's got on the agenda to show Brandi, the lucky lady to whom he lost his virginity at the brothel in Michigan City. But I'm getting sidetracked on Toby's accomplishments in life and this story is about how Toby done good in school one particular summer.*

Toby's school is passing him along despite his poor performance, and Toby gets lucky during his summer schooling, to come across an Oxford educated professor, who's more than happy to share his knowledge of the sexual habits of Civil War soldiers. Toby Dawes finally found a subject he can get behind, and so he proceeds to do good in school. But don't take my word for it. Toby says, "Well, you probably know how this story ends up, so I won't take up more of your time. Especially since I don't think this story making too good an impression. So, I'll just give you a couple more details, and you won't have to read no more." Congratulations on your passing grade, Toby.

Senior Editor Charles writes: *Probably the clearest example of 'voice' we've ever published. It's one of the hardest skills to master in first person singular fiction because it can go wrong in so many ways. But Toby's narrative, both hilarious and wryly penetrating, never misses a beat. A technical triumph and an easy **5 Stars!** (Font size is author's own.)*

How I Done Good in School

by

James Hanna

Hi, my name is Toby Dawes. I'm a farm boy from Putnam County—that's in the middle of Indiana. You probably ain't never heard about me because I don't make much of an impression. But I did become a tad famous last year when Pa took me to a whorehouse in Michigan City. That was for my seventeenth birthday, and that's where I became a man. The whore Dad bought me, Brandi, said I done real good. She said I gave her the best thirty seconds that she had ever had. She said I made her cum three times, and Dad he gave her a hundred dollar tip for showin' me the ropes. Before I left the whorehouse, the madam gave me a Jonathan apple, and she said a cocksmith like me was welcome back any time.

As we was driving back to Putnam County, Pa gave me a bit of a lecture. He said to me, "Toby, now that you've had the real thing, I hope you stop stealing my cock books." Well, I've still been swiping Dad's porn, but I also been writing to Brandi. I told her that, when I got my driver's license, I'll drive up to see her again. I told her I'd like to take her to a tractor pull before got back to screwin'. Brandi, she wrote me back and said I'm a real sweet boy. She said if I took her to a tractor pull, she might give me a golden shower.

Well, I ain't particularly fond of showers, but that don't matter nohow. I just wanted to mention Brandi 'cause she's my best accomplishment. But I'm also real

good at shootin' rats at the Putnam County Dump. I'll bet if I laid 'em side by side, you could count up two hundred rats. I'm hopin' one day that I can teach Brandi the art of shootin' rats.

But this story ain't about killing rats neither. This story is about last summer when I done good in high school. I ain't never done good in school before 'cause I don't apply myself. That's what Ma says anyhow, but I see it real different. As I see it, there ain't no point in learning stuff like science or math. It ain't gonna help you shoot a rat or bleed a buffalo catfish. And if ya walk around spoutin' knowledge all day, ya ain't gonna score no cooze. The cheerleaders will think you're a nerd and won't spread their legs for you. 'Course, I ain't fucked a cheerleader yet 'cause I never impressed 'em enough. But I figger, at least, I got a chance if I don't turn into no nerd. Anyhow, Putnam High School been passing me in spite of my failing grades. The principal says I'm getting passed on probation 'cause the school don't wanna keep me around.

But I'm still gonna tell you this story about how I done *good* in school. That happened just last summer before I started my senior year. Ma said I won't get no diploma if I kept getting passed on probation, and if I don't get no diploma I'll have to work at the Hill Top Hog Farm. She says if I don't pay attention there, them hogs will gobble me up.

Well, Ma made me enroll in an American history course, which was being taught in summer school. She said American history oughta interest me 'cause it's fulla wars and stuff. Ma said she hoped I'd get a teacher like this fella called Mister Chips 'cause that dude knew how to inspire kids and bring out their full potential.

See, Ma's she's always watching this DVD called *Goodbye Mister Chips*. It's about this teacher in England—a fella who couldn't get laid 'cause he was too fulla Latin verbs. It's kinda funny that teacher was played by an actor named Peter O'Toole.

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Well, I started the course on the first day of summer in this classroom with no air conditioning. I was in there with three other farm boys who would rather be poundin' their pork. And the teacher we got—Mister Flanigan—weren't nothin' like Mister Chips. He was a nervous kinda fella and he had a sunken chest, and practically every time he spoke he said the word *actually*. He said stuff like, "Actually, General McClennan wasn't that much of a general. He could have actually won the Civil War after the Battle of Antietam. But after winning the battle, he let the Confederates army get away, so the war lasted three years longer than it actually should have lasted."

Every time that fella said *actually*, we all put marks into our notebooks. I wagered Bubba Little, this kid sittin' beside me, that Mister Flanigan would say it two hundred times before the first week of class was done. Bubba bet a copy of *Hustler* and I bet a Penn fishing rod, and before the fifth day of class was done, that copy of *Hustler* was mine. At first, Bubba said I got the count wrong, but I showed him all the marks I made, which I'd lumped into groups of five. There weren't no way Bubba could welch on the bet 'cause I took real careful notes.

Now Bubba, he weren't too happy that I won his copy of *Hustler*, so he asked me to give him a chance to win his magazine back. He said if I would put up the *Hustler* and let him bet on Mister Flanigan, he would match the bet with a coupla

condoms he been keepin' in his wallet. I asked him how old them condoms were, and he said he'd had 'em four years, and I told him I didn't want no condoms that were probably too old to use. Bubba, he said there ain't no such thing as a condom too old to use. He said I could always fill 'em with water and pelt cars from Hostler's Bridge.

Well, Bubba, he had a point, so I made him another bet, but that didn't matter nohow 'cause Mister Flanigan never came back to class. We was sittin' in the classroom the following Monday, after Bubba and me made our bet, and the principal came into the room and said we was changin' teachers. He said Mister Flanigan weren't coming back 'cause he had caught a case of the flu, and that we was gonna have a new teacher who knew history real good. He said his name was Doctor Nichols and he was educated at Oxford, and he told us to be on our best behavior and make him feel at home. Now I weren't too happy that I'd lost the chance to win some water balloons, but I sat up straight as a poplar and waited to meet our new teacher.

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It weren't but a half-hour later when our new teacher walked into class. He was a short, skinny fella with bottle-thick glasses, and he had this little goatee. He was also wearin' a tweed jacket that looked too big for him, and he was walkin' kinda gimpy like maybe his shoes were too tight. I think I spotted him yesterday in downtown Putnamville. I was walking past the adult store after eating a Big Mac at McDonald's, and a fella who looked kinda like him came limping outta the store. But that dude had a hat pulled over his eyes, so I weren't completely sure it was him.

Anyhow, the dude limped to the blackboard and he picked up a piece of chalk, and he scrawled *Leonard Nichols, Ph.D.* in big ol' skinny letters. And then he spoke to

the class in this real thin, reedy voice. It was a bit like the sound a balloon makes when ya let the air squeak out.

“Oh bum,” he said as he looked us over. “Whatever have I gotten myself into?”

The dude had an English accent, but he didn’t look like Mister Chips. He looked like he’d rather be in back in that porn shop picking out dirty books.

Well, I raised my hand before speakin’ to him ’cause I wanted to show respect. And I said, “How come they sent a doctor to teach us history?”

The dude grabbed the lapels of his jacket then rocked back and forth on his heels. It looked like he’d been thrown into an ocean and was clutchin’ a life preserver. He then spoke as though he was apologizing for cutting a real smelly fart. “I’m a doctor of philosophy,” he said. “I’m a doctor of world history too. When you’re as frightfully educated as I am, lads, all you can do is teach.”

I said, “How come ya gotta teach in a place like Putnam County?”

“Oh, me,” he said. “Well, I travel a bit and sometimes I run out of money. Since teaching is all I am good for, you boys are stuck with me for the summer.” He clutched his lapels even harder and the color went out of his face. “My goodness,” he said, lookin’ over the class. “This is really a sticky wicket.”

“I guess what yer saying,” I said, “is you don’t wanna be stuck with *us*. I ain’t gonna fault you for feeling that way ’cause we don’t make too good an impression.”

“I agree,” he said in his squeaky voice, and he picked up one of our history books. “If you don’t mind a bit of a warning, lads, things may not go very well.”

I kinda liked the fella even though he was probably a pervert. And since Mister Chips weren’t available, I guess he would have to do.

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The fella, he opened a history book and glanced at a couple of pages, then he shrugged and snapped the book shut as though he was trappin' a fly. "Let's have a discussion, lads," he said, and his voice got even more squeaky. "Would one of you like to tell me what the American Civil War was about?"

We sat there like crows on a fence because we couldn't think of nothin' to say. There weren't none of us accustomed to having a teacher ask questions of us.

"Come, come," said the fella. "Would one of you tell me what the Civil War was about?"

Well, the silence was thicker 'an hogs at a trough, so Bubba he spoke up. "Them soldiers was fighting 'bout slavery," he said. "Ain't choo supposed to be teachin' us that?"

The fella he wrung his hands together as though they was covered with ants. He said, "Gracious, why would ordinary boys fight about something like that?"

Well, I think that fella had a point, but I don't think I was supposed to learn that. Shucks, if them soldiers were dumb as me, they wouldn't care about nothin' but cooze.

"My word," said the fella. "It's quite the riddle why those boys chose to fight. Especially when they wore uniforms that were itchy and beastly hot. You know, even the women who followed the camps gave them a pretty rum go."

"Who was them women?" asked Bubba.

"Prostitutes mostly," the fella said. "Now *they* had a reason to be there. They charged the troops three dollars to screw, which was a lot of money in those days.

They also charged a dollar for handjobs if you can imagine that. A lot of soldiers *paid* for something they could have done for themselves.”

Well, I don’t guess there’s nothin’ stupider than paying for a handjob. But my hand shot up like a flushed out quail because I wanted to know more about the subject. “They had handjobs in them days?” I said.

The fella, he nodded and grinned like a possum; he seemed relieved to have found a new subject. “Of course,” he said. “There were blowjobs too, but the whores charged two dollars for those. You know, some of them made so much money that they went home and opened up brothels.”

He went on and told us a whole lot of stuff about what made the Civil War interesting. He said the term “hooker” originated in the Army of the Potomac—that’s ’cause this general named Fighting Joe Hooker liked to bang him a whole lot of beaver. He said some of the whores sold the troops dirty photos and charged ’em as much as four dollars. And he said there was so much clap in them days that soldiers made their own condoms. But they made ’em out of sheep’s gut, so they didn’t work too well.

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After class, I went home and told Ma that we had us a brand new teacher. I said we was learning ’bout sticky wickets and it was real interesting stuff. Ma said it sounded like Doctor Nichols was an English gentleman, and she predicted my education was gonna expand a whole lot. Well, I was thinking about playing hooky and huntin’ feral hogs, but I hurried on back to class the next day ’cause I wanted to learn more history.

Doctor Nichols spoke next 'bout westward expansion 'cause Mister Flanagan had skipped over that. He said a whole lotta screwin' went on in them wagon trains heading west. He said cholera, snakebites, Injuns killed so many of the pioneers that there was a gravestone for every mile along the Oregon Trail. He said the pioneers needed to sire new children to make up for those that died, so after they circled the wagons at night, most of 'em fucked like rabbits.

"It's a good thing those wagons were covered," he said, and he giggled like a drunk. "What went on behind the canvases would have made a degenerate blush."

"Was there golden showers?" I asked him 'cause I wanted to know more about those.

Doctor Nichols scratched his head then smiled. "There *are* no documented incidents," he said, "but I imagine they were quite common. Women who lost their husbands usually turned to prostitution, and there were so many of them turning tricks that competition was fierce. If a patron wanted a golden shower, I'm sure he had only to ask."

He went on to tell us about the mining towns out in California and Montana, about how them towns were built around brothels because the whores were smarter there. He said when payday came around, them miners all rushed to the brothels, and it weren't uncommon for a single whore to screw seventy men a night.

"I dare say it was rather ironic," he said and he chuckled like a setting hen. "The men dug about in the dirt all day while the women were *sitting* on goldmines. The madams made so much money that they ended up running the towns."

"Did them prostitutes cum?" asked Bubba.

Doctor Nichols blushed then nodded. "The women had their pleasure," he said "but it didn't come from their johns. You see, most of the whores had these steam-powered vibrators, which they used to keep themselves clean. A couple of minutes with one of those vibrators left them very satisfied."

"Them whores had it *good*," said Bubba.

"You would think so," Doctor Nichols replied. "But some of them tired of prostitution and married miners and ranchers."

"Bummer," said Bubba.

Doctor Nichols, he shrugged. "Yes, it does seem a bit of a waste. But after those women retired, most became good wives."

Well, I was real happy to hear that 'cause I was still writing to Brandi. And Brandi, she been writing me back and promising me real cheap rates. But, shucks, a woman as fine as her deserves much better than that. I decided that when I was finished with school, I would ask her to be my wife.

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As the semester went on, Doctor Nichols told us a lot more interesting stuff. He said the dirty book industry got its start during the Roaring Twenties. He said *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was the novel that broke the ice, but the stuff that was published after that would have shocked even D.H. Lawrence. He said there was books about whips and midgets and books about lesbian orgies, and he said that a whole lot of taxable revenue was generated by them books. He also described the New York City blackout, when the city was plunged into darkness, and he said a whole generation of kids was sired in stalled elevators. And he told us all about Woodstock, which he

called a cultural phenomenon. I'd never heard about Woodstock 'cause that's ancient history, but I wished I'd been born a hippie after Doctor Nichols told us about it. He said kids were sliding around in the mud and they didn't have to take showers, and girls were running around naked with their tits flapping in the breeze. He said you could have your choice of the girls 'cause the music made 'em horny, and ya didn't have to pay them—they gave it away for free. Well, I wrote a letter to Brandi and I told her all 'bout Woodstock, and Brandi she wrote me back and said that it sounded interestin'. She said she weren't sure it was ethical to give it away for free, but she was sure I had the potential to earn frequent flier rates.

Well, I started taking my history book home, but it weren't too interesting. When I mentioned that to Doctor Nichols, he just patted me on the head. He said school books don't *have* real history in them, and not to be wastin' my time.

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Well, you probably know how this story ends up, so I won't take much more of your time. Especially since I don't think this story is making too good an impression. So I'll just give you a couple more details, and you won't have to read no more.

On the final day of the semester, we was waitin' for Doctor Nichols. We was hopin' he'd tell us a couple more stories before he gave us our final exam. And the principal, he walked into the class like he was about to take a dip in a cesspool, and when we asked him where Doctor Nichols was, the principal said he was indisposed.

The principal handed out the exam papers and, after we answered the questions, he said Doctor Nichols was under arrest for contributin' to the

delinquency of minors. Well, there *ain't* no mines in Putnam County as far as I'm aware, so I dunno where Doctor Nichols found any miners to corrupt.

Anyhow, I kept gettin' passed on probation all through my senior year, and I didn't get no diploma, so I'm working at the Hilltop Hog Farm. And Brandi, she said she won't marry me, and that's got me feelin' real down. But I got a C in American history, and I'm real proud of that.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I do not believe in angels. But I do believe that very flawed people can at times have the impact of angels. I think this might apply to Doctor Leonard Nichols, a sex addict who brings his unique view of history to a classroom of underachieving farm boys. Thanks to Doctor Nichols' prurient lectures, a seed of intellectual suspicion is planted in the boys' minds—an inkling that history may be something more than the polemics found in textbooks. And who knows, perhaps a day will come when these boys will think for themselves. I'm sure that many fine people will find this tale inconvenient, but I bow to Doctor Nichols and his independence of mind.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: James Hanna is a former fiction editor and a retired probation officer. He has had over seventy story publications and three Pushcart nominations. Many of his stories deal with the criminal element. James' books, three of which have won awards, are available on Amazon. You can visit him there at:

https://www.amazon.com/James-Hanna/e/B00WNH356Y?ref=dbs_p_ebk_r00_abau_000000

We published his story **The Lottery** in Issue 4 (Fiction).

EDITOR'S BIO: Benjamin Soileau is from south Louisiana. His fiction has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Colorado Review*, *Opossum*, *Grist*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Bayou*, *Superstition Review* and many other journals. He won the 2018 Rumble Fish Quarterly New Year's Writing Contest, and is a special mention in *The 2020 Pushcart Prize Anthology*. He is a stay at home daddy-o in Olympia, Washington. Reach him at bsoile2@gmail.com. His story **The Delahoussaye Civil War** appears in this issue (Fiction).