

BRANDON J GREER

LIAM LEWIS  
AND THE  
SUMMER CAMP  
CURSE



© 2022 Brandon J. Greer

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form whatsoever, whether by graphic, visual, electronic, film, microfilm, tape recording, or any other means, without prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief passages embodied in critical reviews and articles.

This is a work of fiction. The characters, names, incidents, places, and dialogue are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. The opinions and views expressed herein belong solely to the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions or views of Cedar Fort, Inc. Permission for the use of sources, graphics, and photos is also solely the responsibility of the author.

ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-4201-9

Published by Sweetwater Books, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.

2373 W. 700 S., Springville, UT 84663

Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., [www.cedarfort.com](http://www.cedarfort.com)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022938960

Cover design by Shawnda T. Craig

Cover design © 2022 Cedar Fort, Inc.

Edited and typeset by Valene Wood

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

## CHAPTER ONE



“Detention?!” I cried, slamming my fist on my desk. “But it’s the last day of school.”

“You should have thought about that before throwing the napkin, Liam. Talk to me after class.”

I turned and glared at Flip, who was doing his best to contain his laughter. He’d dared me to do it. Promised me I wouldn’t get caught, too. I wouldn’t have had Mr. Bennion not turned around right as I let go of it.

He pulled the remainder of the soggy napkin from his pressed, blue shirt, threw it in the garbage can, and continued with his lesson. What kind of teacher gives a lesson on the last day of school? He had it coming.

Glancing at the clock, I groaned and dropped my head into my arms. Twenty-five more minutes of this bore-fest. I couldn’t take any more “fun facts” about the Ottoman empire. The upcoming punishment sounded more exciting, though Mom and Dad were going to kill me. This was easily my twentieth time in detention this year.

Boring facts and anecdotes bounced around my skull in Mr. Bennion’s deep, monotone voice until they found one of my ear holes and slipped back out. A sigh escaped my lips when the bell finally rang.

“Have a safe and educational summer,” Mr. Bennion said as he put his pointer down and dismissed the class. Everyone but me. I stayed where I was, waiting to be called. Mr. Bennion had other plans. He didn’t say a word, just put his things in order then sat down at his desk. I watched as he checked his email then opened YouTube.

“Mr. Bennion?” I asked after ten minutes. “What am I supposed to do?”

He looked out the window just as the last bus pulled away. “Nothing. You can go now.”

“What? You kept me here just to miss the bus?”

“No,” Mr. Bennion said, standing up. “I kept you here so you would have to call your parents for a ride. I’ll be waiting for them when they get here.”

“What if I walk home?” I asked.

“I highly doubt you’re going to walk home in this heat.”

I glared out the window and into the baleful sun. He was right but I didn’t want him to know that.

“But I can go?”

“Be my guest,” he said, as he turned back to his computer and picked up his phone.

I snatched up my water bottle and shoved it in my backpack. Without a second glance back, I bolted into the hallway. As soon as his door was out of sight, I slowly made my

way to my locker. For the last time, I entered my combination and pulled it open. It was empty. I had emptied it earlier this week, so I had nothing left to do but leave. I pulled my phone from my pocket and stared at the black, empty screen. I didn't want to call for a ride. It was the last thing I wanted to do. Mom said the next time I got in trouble, I'd regret it. The sudden ring tone surprised me. Mom's picture appeared on the screen. Why was she calling?

"Hey, Mom. What's up?" I asked.

"Don't use that fake voice with me," she said. "You know what's up. Mr. Bennion called me. You just couldn't behave yourself for one more day, could you?"

"But Mom, it wasn't my fault."

"Save the blame. Now stay where you are, I'm on my way to get you."

The line went dead. I turned around to see Mr. Bennion watching me. With a smile, he waved.

"Have a nice summer."

"I hate you," I mumbled under my breath. Mr. Bennion had gone out of his way to make my life miserable all school year. Seventh grade was going to be so much better. Mr. Bennion only taught sixth grade, so I'd be free of his reign of terror.

Turning my back to him, I walked outside and found Flip waiting for me.

"You knew he'd catch me, didn't you?" I cried, rushing up to him.

"I didn't think you'd be dumb enough to do it," he said with a laugh.

"Well, I proved you wrong. Why did you wait?"

"I wasn't going to miss this. I figured there was no way he'd keep you any longer than he had to. It's his summer vacation too," Flip said.

"It was pretty much a setup. I could either walk home or call my mom for a ride. When I left, he ended up calling her for me."

"Brutal. What is she going to do?"

"Attempt to ground me. That's all she can do. She's never home long enough to enforce it."

"So, you'll be at the party tonight then?" Flip asked.

"I wouldn't miss it. Jasmine is going to be there. I might ask her out," I said.

"Sure, you will," Flip said with a grin. "If you couldn't work up the nerve to talk to her all year, what makes tonight any different?"

"Garrett told me that she thinks I'm cute."

"Cute? Are you sure you want to be that guy? I can see friend zone written all over that. If you do something, it's got to be big."

"Like what?" I asked.

"Kiss her," Flip said.

"What?" I cried. "No, I couldn't do that."

"It's going to be the only way to get her to notice you."

I thought about it. If I wanted to spend time with her this summer, I'd have to do something to make an impression. Just saying hi might not do it. Maybe Flip had a point?

"I'll think about it," I said, standing up when I saw Mom's SUV pull into the school parking lot. How had she gotten here so fast? "I'll text you later."

"And don't forget, Javier is going to be there. You still want to talk to him, right?"

Javier was Flip's cousin and the coolest guy I knew, and he was in a gang. Okay, it might not have been exactly a gang but it was the closest thing I was willing to get to one. He was a few years older than me, but if you got in with him, you were set until you graduated. If you graduated. His friends weren't the type to take school seriously, which suited me just fine. Anything to set me apart from the rest of my family.

"Yeah, of course."

"Good, because I've talked you up. Don't let me down."

"I wouldn't think of it," I called back as I walked away.

Flip saluted me then walked around the back of the school. A bead of sweat dripped down the back of my shirt as I thought about Javier. He might be cool, but he was dangerous. I'd been having second thoughts about meeting with him ever since I asked Flip about it, but if I wanted Jasmine to think I was cool, I needed to act cool. Shaking off my doubt, I hurried to the car. My fingers had just touched the door handle when my heart stopped.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Lewis. How are you?"

It was Mr. Bennion. He hadn't been bluffing and was waving her over. I hung my head as Mom turned off the car and got out. She was going to do her best to embarrass me, I knew it. Pulling open the door, I climbed in and slammed it shut behind me. I might have to be in sight, but I didn't have to listen to them. I put on my headphones and stared out the front windshield, ignoring the tapping now echoing around the interior.

"Liam, open the door," Mom said.

I turned to her then locked the door with a smile.

She held the keys in front of the glass, proving that my insubordination was futile. "Liam Joseph Lewis, open the door right this instant."

My eyes grew wide. She middle-named me in front of Mr. Bennion. Today couldn't get any worse now. I unlocked the door and pushed it open.

"You owe Mr. Bennion an apology and we're not leaving until he gets one."

Mr. Bennion stared at me. I could still see the darker wet blue where the napkin had struck him.

"I'm sorry," I said, not even taking my headphones off. Mom glared at me. "Fine."

I pulled the headphones from my ears and got out of the car. I knew that if I didn't do this right, we'd never go home.

"I'm sorry I threw a wet napkin at you, Mr. Bennion."

Mr. Bennion nodded at me. "I was young once too, believe it or not. I know what it's like. Just have more respect for your teachers in the future."

He turned around and walked back into the school. I hopped back into the SUV, happy that everything was over. Or so I thought. When Mom got in the car, she didn't start it. I looked over at her.

"We need to talk," she said.

"I know. I'm grounded."

"Not this time. We've established that doesn't work. Not with your father and I being at work as much as we are. You're just lucky I was on break and at the store when Mr. Bennion called or you would have been walking home today. But no, grounding won't do this time."

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

“Your father and I came up with a plan for you. We told you that if you got in trouble again, things would be different. You chose not to believe us and the incident with the spray paint was the last straw, this was just the icing on top. We’ve arranged for you to go to summer camp this year.”

“Summer camp?” I cried.

“We can’t be home to watch you every second of the day. This will ensure your punishment.”

“I can’t go to summer camp. I have plans.”

“You should have thought about that before you started vandalizing the school, assaulting and embarrassing your teachers, and stealing from your parents.”

I wanted to deny everything or plead insanity, whatever would get me out of summer camp. If I was gone, I couldn’t spend time with Jasmine.

“I’ll be better,” I pleaded. “I promise.”

Mom laughed. “I’ve heard that one before. No, this is what you need.”

“You don’t know what I need,” I said, shoving my headphones back on and cranking the music. I stared out the window, watching the trees, telephone poles, and speed limit signs zip past as I pretended to listen to Brandon Flowers sing “Mr. Brightside.” For a moment, I glimpsed the Salt Lake City skyline as we passed an empty field, but towering trees soon hid it from view. Mom was not wasting any time getting me home. I didn’t look at her again until we pulled into the driveway.

“Whose car is that?” I asked.

A dark, dusty sedan sat by the curb in front of our house. I’d never seen it before.

“I told you,” Mom said. “We have a plan.”

I shouldered my backpack and stormed into the house, planning on locking myself in my bedroom until it was time to sneak out for the party. Dad was standing at the bottom of the stairs when I entered, blocking my way. He was talking to a strangely dressed man sitting on the couch.

“Who’s that?” I asked.

“Where are your manners, young man?” Dad asked, keeping his cool surprisingly well. I knew that look in his eyes. He was angry with me. Again.

I appraised the stranger. His whole appearance screamed used car salesman, which would explain the sedan. He wore a loose-fitting, black pin-striped suit with an over-pressed white shirt under it. The top two buttons were undone, exposing a tuft of thick chest hair. Pale gray hair had been slicked back to his skull and hung to his shoulders. I wanted to laugh. My faded and ripped blue jeans and orange hoodie were much more comfortable than his outfit looked.

“Liam, this is Mr. Hallister. He’s the director of a very special, highly rated summer camp.”

I continued to eye him. “Why is he here?”

Dad was about to respond when Mr. Hallister raised a hand, cutting him off.

“The boy is quite alright. I never expect this to be easy, especially on the first afternoon of summer vacation. And please, the name is Hallister. No Mr. needed.” A thick, almost British accent rolled off his tongue.

“That doesn’t answer my question,” I said.

“Honey,” Mom said. She only called me that when she was about to drop a bomb on me. “He’s here for you. I told you about this in the car. You’ve been getting in too much

trouble lately and you know how busy work has been for both me and your father.”

“That wasn’t just a threat? You’re really going to ship me off to some stupid camp?”

“Watch your tone,” Dad said. “Now come over here and sit down.”

I glanced back at the door and considered bolting until Dad’s hand fell on my shoulder. I brushed it off and walked into the living room. I decided to get it over with and collapsed into the Lay-Z-Boy on the far side of the room.

“Why don’t we start with a list of the boy’s transgressions,” Hallister said. “What trouble has he gotten into?”

Transgressions? What was this guy talking about? Was he some kind of priest or something? And why was he referring to me as the boy? I officially didn’t like this guy.

“Things have been getting worse lately,” Mom said. “I’m constantly getting calls from the school about him missing class, causing trouble, and getting into fights. It’s become almost a weekly thing. He’s even been brought home by the police before for shoplifting. We’ve tried to discipline him at home, but Nathan and I work long hours. I’m afraid our time away could be part of the problem.”

“Does he show any remorse for his actions?” Hallister asked.

“I’m not sure. If he does, he works double-time to cover it up. I’m sick to my stomach thinking about what might happen next. What will we do if Liam ends up doing something he can’t take back?”

“That is a perfectly reasonable worry, Mrs. Lewis,” Hallister said. “We want our children to be safe and on the right path. We dread seeing them on the road to self-destruction. I’m happy you reached out to me. Liam is exactly the kind of camper I’m looking for.”

“How does this camp of yours work?” Dad asked.

I fidgeted in my seat as I waited for Hallister to respond. They were treating me like I wasn’t even in the room.

“An excellent question. As you are aware, my camp caters to troubled youth—teens and preteens who find themselves teetering on the cusp of that dark abyss. Truly, this is the nightmare of every parent. Now, you must understand that my camp is not a traditional one. On this, we must be perfectly clear. You won’t find any camp songs, horseback riding, or swimming lakes. And no contact with anyone outside of camp. No, that would only distract them and hinder what I am trying to accomplish. At camp, Liam will be given a task and the means to complete it. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Your pamphlet claims you have a one hundred percent success rate when it comes to rehabilitating your campers. How?” Dad asked, a glossy pamphlet hanging loosely from his hands. How come I’d never seen that before?

“I would prefer that you hear that from other parents who have been in your same situation,” Hallister said as he reached into his suit and produced a thick tablet. Pressing a button on the top, he unfolded it once, twice, three times. When he was done, it looked like a small, flat-screen television. That was seriously impressive. He had my attention now.

“May I introduce Craig and Brenda Thompson. They had a daughter in a similar situation, though slightly more advanced. Here is what they had to say.”

Hallister pressed another button and the screen flickered into life. Two people shimmered into view.

*“Sherry is out of control,” Sherry’s dad said. “She is constantly talking back to us and storms in and out of the house, disrespecting any type of authority. A couple of weeks ago, Brenda found cigarettes in her bedroom. She’s only fourteen. I’m afraid this is only going to lead to worse behavior and heavier drug use. We want her to confide in us, to tell us what’s going on, but nothing works. It seems the harder we try, the more she pushes away. We need help.”*

The video paused.

“My camp is three weeks in duration,” Hallister said. “In that time, my campers learn life lessons they simply refuse to learn at home, though it is a bit more intensive. Within that time, my campers show exceptional change and growth.”

He pressed play again. The words three weeks later floated by.

*“I can’t believe the transformation.” It was Sherry’s mom this time. “The first thing Sherry did when she walked through the door was hug me. She apologized for all the trouble she’d caused us. She was still our little Sherry, but the Sherry we remembered from before. It was such a pleasure to have her back in the house. And she wanted to help with things. She acted so maturely. I don’t know what happened at camp, but it was a game changer. I would recommend Hallister’s summer camp to any parent struggling with a teenager. The difference has been night and day.”*

The woman’s face dissolved into blackness, quickly being replaced by another. Hallister paused the video again.

“Albert and Allison Wynder,” he announced then pressed play.

*“Zack has gone off the deep end,” Allison said. “He rarely comes home anymore and he’s only sixteen. When we do see him, he’s not himself. His eyes are usually glazed over, and he walks around like a zombie. I’ve seen him out in town a few times with some of the local gang members. When I try to confront him about it, he shuts me out. He’s been turning more aggressive lately and I’m afraid he’s going to turn violent.”*

Again, the words three weeks later floated by. This time a man’s face appeared.

*“What have you done with my son? He’s so loving and caring now. He actually worries about his mother and her well-being. He even wants to help pay the bills. Before, I would have been worried to leave him at home alone for fear of things going missing. Now? I feel better knowing he’s here. Whatever Hallister did was well worth it. I would have paid ten times what I did to see this kind of change in Zack. Hands down, sending him to Hallister’s summer camp was the best thing I’ve done as a parent.”*

The video cut to black and the only thing I could think about was cult brainwashing. How else could you explain something like that? Or it was an elaborate lie, which seemed more likely.

“I can assure you that I’m not here to swindle you out of your hard-earned money. My services work. That is why I only ask for half up front. Do you have any questions?”

“Where do we sign?” Dad asked. “This sounds like the perfect place for Liam.”

“Don’t I get a say in this?” I cried, slapping the armrest of the chair.

Ignoring me, Hallister pulled an impossibly long sheet of paper from his pocket. It wasn’t folded, crinkled, or ripped at all. If I hadn’t been in such a bad mood, I might have asked him how he did that. Maybe he worked as a part-time birthday magician? By the looks of his clothes, it might be a full-time gig.

“This is my standard contract,” Hallister said, handing Dad a pen. “It covers everything we’ve just talked about along with some of the more boring, legal details. I have another copy for you just in case you have questions later.”

Dad signed it without hesitation then handed the pen to Mom.

“I think that does it,” Dad said, sliding the paper across the coffee table after Mom had finished signing.

“Everything appears in order. I will have an associate of mine contact you regarding the first half of the payment in the morning. Are there any other questions?”

“When does camp start?” Mom asked.

“First thing tomorrow morning.”

“What?” I jumped to my feet. “No. There is no way I’m going to camp tomorrow. I have things to do.”

“Like what?” Mom asked.

“Important things,” I cried. “I can’t be shipped off to some stupid camp.”

“Is it okay if I have a few minutes alone with the boy?” Hallister asked. “I like to evaluate each camper individually and privately.”

I paled as Mom and Dad walked out of the room without a fight. I didn’t want to be alone with this lunatic. I silently pleaded with them to stay but it was in vain. When they were gone, Hallister smiled at me then crossed the room in three, long strides.

**You've Just Finished your Free Sample**

**Enjoyed the preview?**

**Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>**