

This coming of age novel takes place in the 1960's.

The Road to Golden

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/3901.html?s=pdf>

***The Road to Golden***

a novel by

Dale M. DeVoss

Copyright © 2007 Dale M. DeVoss

ISBN-13 978-1-60145-270-2

ISBN-10 1-60145-270-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Printed in the United States of America.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Booklocker.com, Inc.

2007

Library of Congress Control Number: TXu1-162-478

**For Debbie & Daphne, Forever.**



## **Acknowledgments**

I wish to thank Brad Schreiber for his tireless devotion to this project and support he has provided me in seeing this to publication.

Also I wish to thank Dick Cote, and Bill Appel for the professional editorial help to get my novel to the publishable level.

*One light, light that is one, though the lamps be many....*

-Traditional Saying-

## Chapter 1

**I**t was Johnny who started everything. I don't know what kind of life I would have had without him.

It was Johnny who got me the job on the potato farm. It was Saturday and we were rumbling down in the early morning light to the farm in his '62 Ford pickup. In four years, it looked like it had been through a war. It was plain brown, no frills, the kind of truck that you get for your first mode of transportation and are damned happy to have. To us, it was the most beautiful truck that there ever was, because it represented our freedom. Johnny was a wise sixteen years old and I was his fifteen-year-old acolyte. He held the steering wheel with one hand while pointing out the vast country side with the other one.

"You know, someday this will all be nothing but stores and sub-divisions." And with this sad pronunciation, he shook his head from side to side, realizing the full impact of the inevitable.

The last couple of miles of road were like an asphalt patchwork quilt, the kind you usually come across in the countryside, and you had to be very careful to stay on the road. Hitting a pothole could send a roaring pickup careening off the road into a ditch. I never worried with Johnny though, because he had been driving since he was ten years old and seemed to have a sixth sense behind the wheel.

It was late autumn and the Michigan countryside had a general brownish tint to it, with occasional fields still throwing



*Dale M. DeVoss*

off a golden hue. It reminded me of one time, also in the fall, when Johnny was looking out the window as he drove and said that the fields reminded him of a painting by Van Gogh. I had asked Johnny who “this Van Gogh guy” was and he went on and on about the painter, as he would do about so many artists that he knew about. I would always enjoy these lengthy talks and I learned to be a good listener. It was Johnny who got me started reading poetry from the library.

We were on the final stretch of road now, and the big farm loomed in the distance. It was on twelve hundred acres in all. We worked out of the big barn, just off the road, with the large farm house just to the right of it. Actually, it made me feel as if I was going to my real home, every time we arrived. It was always a beehive of activity, with dogs barking, people going this way and that, chickens scurrying. There would be energy everywhere you looked.

Johnny wheeled into his spot as he always did, as though he was in a hurry to get there, even though we were always fifteen minutes early. He liked to get to the farm before our shift and have a cup of coffee with Mr. or Mrs. Petersen who ran the farm. I didn't care much for coffee, but I loved listening to the chatter that preceded our workday. It was the kind of talk that you would hear in small towns everywhere.

"Little cold today, but I don't think the ground will be hard enough where we can't plow it," Mr. Petersen might say.

He reminded me a little of Andy Griffith, who I watched on TV, a kind, soft-spoken gentleman farmer of the great American landscape. Once the afternoon group heard him or his wife make some statement about the quality of the sky or the

*The Road to Golden*

soil or the time of year or the harvest, we allowed for a long pause, and then, out of the silence, the foreman bellowed, "Let's go," and the work commenced.

With that statement, the foreman took his seat in a moving chair way above the floor layout in the barn. Everyone scrambled to get into position. I had a spot right in front of the machine that automatically bagged the potatoes. I placed the plastic bags up on clamps that opened up and grabbed the bag. If I wasn't careful, the bags would slip off and potatoes would spill on the floor.

This happened rarely but was always an awkward moment, for when it did, the foreman gave me the evil eye. I had just four seconds until the next clamp came along and in these four seconds I had to take the bag and put it through a staple machine and then drop it on a conveyor. This automated process didn't allow for any pause on my part. I had to be just as quick as the system and if I got out of sync, the whole process shut down. On these occasions, the foreman would swing over to where I was and give me a verbal thrashing. I'd just smile as I picked up the loose potatoes.

I really didn't mind the foreman, whose name was Leonard. He was all business during working hours but after, he cut loose and joked around, usually snapping someone with a rag. Leonard had stopped going to school after the third grade. He had a squarish head which sloped toward a pronounced brow, and huge, ape-like arms. His thumbs pointed straight out at the first joint, almost to a ninety degree angle. Leonard talked to you out of the side of his mouth, even when he looked at you straight in the face. He often ate raw potatoes from the wash line as if they were apples. Sometimes he spied a rat or a mouse

*Dale M. DeVoss*

and hurled his potato at it as quick as most people spit, and continued talking without missing a beat.

Johnny had the job of fork lift driver and as with all machinery, cars and trucks, he operated it with the utmost skill and dexterity. He usually was so quick that in between loads, he could be found puffing on a cigarette, waiting for the rest of us to do our end of the cycle. The potatoes never stopped coming in, the never ending process of dump, wash, inspect, wash again, inspect again, and then finally, into the bags and loaded on the trucks.

Despite the repetition of the job, I felt I belonged to something, perhaps just part of the history of farming, as well as being part of a unit, something functional, workable, of benefit to others. As with most farm life, there were always the rich, enticing smells issuing from the farmhouse kitchen. Mrs. Petersen was in there all day cooking, answering the phone, taking care of all who came to the door. And forever, she had that same, sweet patient demeanor about her. I wandered into the kitchen from time to time just to say hello and Mrs. Petersen greeted me with a welcoming smile, and some fruit cobbler, or an ear of corn dipped in butter, or still warm peanut butter cookies.

One night, I sat in the strange yet beautiful twilight, the workday over. The sun had set on the farm and made the great expanse of land shrink down to just the twinkling lights of the barn and farmhouse, fine jewels in a vast darkness. Often Johnny and I would stay for twenty minutes or so just to join everyone and chat. The older workers would sit down with glasses of beer which they made themselves and the rest of us would have a pop. I was busy watching the lock up, enjoying

*The Road to Golden*

the last moments on the farm before heading home for supper. Johnny broke my reverie.

"Eddie, you want to go with me tonight to the bar?" By this he meant the place where his girlfriend Missy was a go-go dancer. By 1966 standards, Mary "Missy" Springer was a bad girl who wore "wicked outfits" and shook it up for farm hands. To make it even more sordid, Missy told them she was eighteen when in reality she was only sixteen. I thought Johnny was extraordinarily fortunate.

"Sure, yeah, I'd love to go Johnny." It was a reason to leave my house early and another chance to talk to Missy's friend Pamela. We said our goodbyes to the Petersens, to Leonard, to the other farmhands.

They waved and called out good-natured warnings, like "Don't let Johnny drive too fast" and "Not too much booze" and "Make sure you can still get up in the morning." We returned their chuckles and headed to Johnny's truck, reluctant in a way to leave but still heading off to our own separate dinners, and then on to our mutual adventure for the night.

\*\*\*

The clutter of my room was welcome chaos: my guitar, the songs I'd written, my records, my favorite books. My father poked his head in on occasion, and would remark "What a pig sty!" and, if I was lucky, went on his way. Sometimes, he took belongings of mine and hurled them against the walls, complaining about what I read or listened to or had decorating the walls of my room. I watched him vent, silent, not afraid but

*Dale M. DeVoss*

more confused by his utter disgust. I wondered what made him so furious. Surely, selling used cars for years in the same small town, no matter how many times you were rejected, did not amount to this much bitterness. He seemed like an outsider to me, someone who I didn't belong to.

But my mother, in marked contrast, could stand in the doorway of my room and talk with me without once remarking about the state of disarray. She noticed when I put up a new poster or picked up a book of poems by William Blake or one of the Beat poets. She knew how much the poetry meant to me, how I tried to create songs which captured the same feelings I had when read those poems.

My mother and father both knew that Johnny pointed me to the books, to other artists and writers. My father did not like that I read more than most kids. To him, reading was another opportunity to avoid work. But my mother, whose only indulgence was the touch-up of her platinum blonde hair she had done each week at the beauty parlor, knew how much I needed music and poetry to survive life in Romeo, Michigan.

Johnny had dropped me off at home and promised to be back in an hour. I washed up, put on black shirt and black jeans and black socks, in preparation for the evening's activities. This style of dress was known as the "greaseball" or "greaser" look and Johnny and I were proud members of that fraternity, whenever we were not working on the farm.

I lay across my bed, the smells of pot roast and green beans wafting in from the kitchen where my mother labored. In those few moments when I found myself alone, I either wrote songs or read, and now, I stretched my lean body out to the

*The Road to Golden*

night stand to bring out, if not the poems of John Keats, then the book that served that function for me.

Johnny had given me the collected poems of John Keats. He had purchased it at a book sale sponsored by the local library. He read it and one day simply handed it to me with the curious half-smile which often crept over his face.

His only words about its contents were, “This is rock and roll from another time.”

Its worn, black cover, which went so nicely with my greaser outfit, was pebbled and I liked running my fingertips across its surface before opening it, inhaling its musty, comforting smell. On the first page were the words “Hyperion by John Keats (1795-1821).” It was poetry about poetry, a dream about having dreams, and on the first page, I had underlined one of many passages: “*Who alive can say, ‘Thou art no Poet—may’st not tell thy dreams?’*” My father could say it. But I didn’t have to believe it.

\*\*\*

I looked at the clock and brushed my hair. Entering the kitchen, I took one of the three plates laid on the pale blue cloth and walked over to the stove to serve myself.

“Eddie,” my mother murmured, in a sweet, sad tone. “Please have dinner with your father and me.”

I helped myself to some meat and vegetables.

*Dale M. DeVoss*

“Smells great, mom,” I complimented her, as I sat down and dug in, powerfully hungry and in a hurry. There were no sounds but the alternate chomping of food and guzzling of milk.

She wiped her hands, studied them to be sure they were clean and then stood behind me, gently placing them on my shoulders. “I wish you would at least wait until your father comes home, say hello, and then go out with Johnny.”

I chewed the food in my mouth, which gave me more time to consider my answer. “I would, Ma, if he could just limit it to hello.”

She walked around the table and sat facing me. I made noises to suggest how tasty the meal was. She smiled.

“What do I have to do to get you to have dinner with us every once in a while?” she asked, but there was no anger in her voice.

I looked up into her eyes and the feeling of guilt that washed over me became strong, too strong to meet her gaze head-on. I glanced past her shoulder into the living room, to the piano which sat against a far wall.

“Promise me you’ll play the piano for me tonight and I’ll stay home.” She shook her head, smiling ruefully.

“You know your father doesn’t like piano playing when he’s around.”

*The Road to Golden*

I shoveled the last of the green beans into my mouth and got up, walking over to the sink.

“Then play something for me, right now,” I called over my shoulder. I had asked many times before, and always, she had claimed an excuse, either that my father wouldn’t like it or, if she had used that in the recent past, that she didn’t feel in the mood.

I turned on the hot water in the sink, let a bit of cooler water mix with it and tried to remember the last piece of music I had heard her play. Was it one of the Chopin etudes? Or perhaps it was one those old standards, like “What’s New?” There was the time we were alone in the house and I sang The Beatles songs while she good-naturedly played them. She actually giggled while I sang “Drive My Car,” and twisted and writhed, as if performing in front of thousands. But it took a turn when I showed her the sheet music for “In My Life.” I sang it softly, as it was written, put my all into the line, “In my life, I’ve loved them all.” And then she had stopped, her eyes misty. But willing back the tears, she continued and I finished the song, the last one of the night. But that was long ago and I knew she wouldn’t remember the last song she played. I knew that it would hurt her to ask, so I didn’t. Instead, I scrubbed the dish with a vengeance.

“You can leave that. I’ll wash it.”

“No, no, I got it.” I brushed the gravy and bits of gristle off the plate, watched it mix with the water flow and slowly circle toward the drain. I jammed the plate and my cup into the dish drainer. It clattered loudly. My mother looked over, to see if anything had broken.



*Dale M. DeVoss*

“Sorry, ma,” I said. And then the lights of Johnny’s truck appeared coming toward us. We both turned slightly in its direction, as we had done night after night, before my father had come home from the car lot.

“You’re going to play again for me one day, aren’t you?” I asked. I was not sure I wanted to hear her answer.

“You go, now,” she replied, patting my shoulder. “Have a good time. You’re only young once.”

\*\*\*

Johnny had a perfectly fine radio in the truck but being the master of all things mechanical and electrical, he had a record player hooked up to the wiring under the dashboard. As we blasted down the road, I glanced through the stack of forty-five RPM records he had chosen for the soundtrack of our drive. I knew what the first one was. Every night together began with the same song, Johnny Rivers lamenting about life on the “Poor Side of Town.” This song seemed too personal, like Romeo Michigan was in the middle of nowhere. I felt cut off from the world, from the possibilities of my own life.

“Hey, DJ,” Johnny shouted, breaking up my thoughts, “next song. You think I want to hear the crackle at the end of song for a half hour?”

I lifted the tone arm and put it aside. I couldn’t tell what the next song would be because Johnny always mixed up the stack after Johnny Rivers. There was only the faintest light from the dashboard and Johnny's cigarette for illumination. I

*The Road to Golden*

wondered if the phonograph was pulling juice off the electrical system of the truck to such a degree that it dimmed the lights. It didn't matter. We were dressed in greaser black, driving in a barely lit truck across a night road with no lights, and it fit the black, despondent mood I was in.

I put the unidentified 45 on the record player and lowered the tone arm, hoping for the surge of power I might feel from a hard driving song, the boost from the screech of an amplified guitar, the lyrics of wild abandon that could make me want to French-kiss the first cute girl I spied. Instead of any of that, Roy Orbison began wailing "Only the Lonely."

"Man, in just a while, I will be looking up at Missy, and her body and that face, God, that face, and she'll be gyrating in front of all those guys and then throw me a wink like she always does. And it will send me to Heaven. Whoooooeeee!"

He was tapping on the steering wheel, and as I listened to Roy Orbison, all I could see in my mind was my father yelling at my mother while he ate, and her scurrying between the table and kitchen, to bring him whatever he asked for. I saw him asking for one thing and another so that by time she began to eat her own dinner, it was cold.

"Man, I need to hear something more upbeat, something that will rock me senseless."

Johnny looked at me surprise, not only for the tone of my voice but for assertion that somehow the songs we had listened to over and over on many nights with great gusto now no longer were worth hearing.

*Dale M. DeVoss*

“What’s with you?” he asked.

“I want a rock chord to tear through my stomach and pull out my innards and swing them around my head like a rope!”

I rolled down the window on my side and pushed half of my body out the window, staring out into the black countryside. I screamed a high shriek of disgust, a trapped animal. I battled the roar of wind but I kept shouting. When I felt the rage dissipate a little, I pulled my body back inside the truck.

Johnny looked over me with his half-smile. “Exactly,” was all he said.

## Chapter 2

The drive out from the farmland into the town was always a chance for us to “cruise by” what we considered the hot spots to see if we recognized anyone who was hanging out. A good night involved seeing two cars racing side by side, or a couple of guys thrashing each other in a parking lot over some girl they both wanted, or even a rumble between the rival gangs which roamed the area. As was usually the case, the mundane world of adults, their business, shopping and farming ruled by day, while the hormonal, bored, overly energized kids of those adults ruled by night.

As we sidled up to the neon glow of the A& W Root Beer restaurant, we spotted Gino Titale’s hot rod, gleaming, metallic red, chrome insanely reflecting back the light of the sign. No one was parked next to it and for good reason. Everyone in the night world of Romeo knew who Gino was, that he was a teen carved out of granite with a hair trigger temper. If you hadn’t seen Gino snap and flash his fists into the face or knife into the stomach of a potential adversary, then by all means you had heard about it from a number of bystanders.

Like I said, no one parked next to Gino’s car. Johnny and I were eating at the A&W the night someone new to town pulled up next to Gino’s car. Gino was making out with one of his revolving door girlfriends at the time and he immediately got out of his car, approached the unsuspecting victim and blocked the door to the restaurant before the poor bastard could slam closed his own car door.

“You’re crowding my car there, pal.”

*Dale M. DeVoss*

The visitor took one look at Gino's flat, dead eyes and blank stare and knew instantly he picked the wrong place for a cheeseburger. He quickly apologized and moved his car. Such was Gino's power that those inside the parked cars had fallen silent and held their breath.

Johnny eased his truck one space away from Gino's car. Tonight, Gino had a blonde with dark roots hanging on him, nuzzling his cheek. Gino turned in slow motion toward us. Luckily, he liked us. He had seen our band The Caretakers playing a gig. Afterward, he walked right up to Johnny, who was still sitting behind his drum kit.

"You drum loud. I like that." He nodded slightly to Johnny, then to me, ignored the two other players in our band, and then walked off with whatever girl he happened to be with that night.

People came up to us and murmured in amazed tones how great it was that Gino liked us. I was just relieved he hadn't impaled me with the neck of my own guitar.

"Hey, Gino, check this out!" Johnny called out.

Not even members of Gino's gang shouted to him. You never spoke to Gino unless he acknowledged you first, with a word or a gesture. But Johnny felt the power and status of Gino's acceptance and pushed it. He wanted to be like Gino. This puzzled me. I thought it would have been more than enough to be Johnny.

Gino blew an impossibly long stream of cigarette smoke into the air as he surveyed Johnny, who tested the limits of his

*The Road to Golden*

speakers with a song by The Byrds. Gino stopped to listen. The blonde stopped to look at Gino, to see his reaction to the music. He stared up into the night sky for a few moments and then gradually shifted his gaze back to us with the slightest nod, indicating his approval.

“The Byrds. Pretty cool, huh?” Johnny smiled.

“Yeah,” I agreed, looking at Gino, almost talking directly to him. “Byrds are great.”

The blonde, relieved that Gino was pleased, leaned her head on one of his massive shoulders and we listened to the song, one car parking spot apart. When it was over, Gino looked over at us again.

“When you guys play again?”

“Two weeks,” replied Johnny loudly.

Gino nodded and then turned to his female companion, to kiss her and officially notify us that our conversation was over. Johnny flashed the headlights a couple times and one of the carhops came out and hooked a tray on the half-rolled down window on Johnny’s side. He flashed her a dazzling smile and she returned it, in mild, unspoken flirtation. I never stopped marveling how confident Johnny seemed to be in everything he did or said. He probably could have asked the carhop to hop in the back of the truck with him and have her seriously consider it. We ordered two root beers and as she wrote it down, a series of screeches sounded in the night air. Three cars came fishtailing into the parking lot. They stopped, side by side by side, their lights on, their engines rumbling.

“Oh, no. It’s Bobby Jones’s gang,” the carhop gulped. She headed back into the restaurant without even asking us what we wanted to eat. Gino’s girl had glanced over a couple times at the cars but he directed her face back to him, as cool as can be. For a couple minutes, despite the presence of the cars, nothing happened and we waited for them to leave. These stand-offs sometimes occurred and since Gino’s gang was not with him, it seemed Bobby and his boys were merely making their presence known, trying to spook Gino. There was a loud, exhaust-filled period of inactivity. The people both inside and outside of the A&W looked tense, wondering if Bobby’s gang would attack Gino without the defense of his guys. In fact, the only one who didn’t seem at all concerned was Gino.

Then, Bobby exited one of the cars with a nervous-looking girl who he walked a few feet toward us. Bobby put his arm around the girl, who looked to be growing tinier by the moment, as if she was trying to will herself into a puff of smoke, disappearing from the parking lot, and possibly Romeo, forever.

"Hey Gino," Bobby called out and all conversation stopped. "Cheryl over here says that you're a worthless slime ball and treated her bad, man. What's the matter with you? Don't you know shit how to treat a woman?" He was shouting so loud, there was no way Gino could pretend he didn't hear it.

Gino had gone out with Cheryl for a while, and, she not only decided to leave him, she had caused further insult by taking up with Bobby, the person Gino most despised. This was a mounting insult, carefully chosen at a moment when Gino would be most humiliated and least able to do anything violent.

*The Road to Golden*

Gino, who was known for an explosive temper, appeared cool for the moment. He got out of his car, leaving the door open, walked around to the back and leaned on the trunk, sizing up Bobby and Cheryl. Johnny and I looked at each other, wondering what would happen, whether we would have to come to Gino's defense in front of Bobby's thick-browed, excessively mean goons.

"Cheryl," Gino called back, forcing her to take an unconscious step backward.

Bobby gripped her arm, preventing her from fleeing the scene.

"Cheryl," he shouted again, this time with an amused tone, "I know you don't got much brains, but what are you doing with a guy who needs you and his pathetic gang to back him up just to talk to me?"

Bobby shoved Cheryl away from him and took a few steps toward Gino. Some of his thugs opened their car doors, at the ready.

"Fuck ass dago shit, don't talk to her! I'm talking to you! If you knew the first thing about satisfying a woman, she wouldn't have left you." As an additional comment, Bobby raised his middle finger to Gino.

Now, the veins were starting to protrude from Gino's neck. In the past, this had been an indication, if you saw it, that you were about to have your ass handed to you. It was a road map to his fury. We saw it before, when he had lashed out and put



some kid into the hospital. But yards away, across the parking lot asphalt, Bobby and his gang could not see it.

After a few moments, Gino smirked and shook his head, as if amused. He looked back at his car, the girl in it, her face drained of blood, and then to us, looking as if we expected to be rushed and sliced open by Bobby's horde. He headed back to the car.

"You're chickenshit!" Bobby hurled one last epithet, hoping to goad Gino into a self-destructive, angry rush toward his own doom.

Gino reached the car and lazily turned back to his potential assailant. "Hey, Bobby. Your class is in your ass. When you don't have your gang and your girl protecting you, I'll be happy to take you on, any time."

He got into the car and turned up the radio loud, preventing Bobby from saying anything in response. Bobby did shout something we could not hear, pointed in a menacing fashion and his armada of cars revved up and roared off.

We drank our sodas and bid goodbye to Gino, who invited us to a barn dance, if we felt like it, later that night. He casually dismissed us with a gesture that was almost a wave and Johnny fired up the truck and got us moving again.

"Gino could have mopped the parking lot with Bobby," Johnny claimed.

"It's a good thing he didn't try," I mused. I listened to the whooshing of air and squeaking of springs on the truck as we

*The Road to Golden*

tore down the dark country roads of farmland America. “Why do you think Gino likes us?”

As Johnny often did, he tilted his head back, his cigarette dangling from his mouth, and replied out of the side of his mouth.

“Music,” he said. “He likes our music. It’s one way of communicating. If they like the words you write and sing, and the music I write and play, they don’t have to know who we are. They’ll either like us and the music, or they won’t.”

\*\*\*

I thought about this as we bounced up and down in our seats as we drove across the gravel of the parking lot of the bar where Missy was a dancer. But I had no time to ponder the mystery of music, for Johnny wheeled the truck to a parking space, spitting up the crushed rocks into the air.

“In just a few minutes, I’ll see my baby’s face. And she’ll dance for me...”

He paused. The part of my mind that created lyrics unconsciously snapped to attention.

“In a tender embrace.”

“Nah,” Johnny offered, “I was going to say, ‘eternal embrace.’”

“I don’t like eternal embrace,” I countered. “It sounds too much...”

“Like what?”

“Like a tombstone.”

Johnny nodded agreement with my logic, threw the truck into park, turned it off and was out the door in one fluid motion. As always, I was trailing him, trying to catch up as he let the smoke of his cigarette curl around his head, standing in the back door of the bar. His eyes scanned the darkness of the interior, finally settling on his intended target: Gus. His stare gained the attention of Gus, who beamed and walked over to us, shaking our hands and ushering us to the niche he saved for us in the kitchen. Pounding music was issuing forth and we heard the yelpings and howlings of the patrons, as a girl in a bikini gyrated on a small stage to blaring music which pushed the capabilities of the bar’s speakers.

“That little lady of yours is next,” Gus yelled into Johnny’s ear.

Gus was much older than us, perhaps even in his thirties but he seemed to understand Johnny's gyrating free-spiritedness and swagger, and treated Johnny in a way I often wish my father treated me: as a pal, one glad to see me whenever I happened by and not too nosy about the details of my life. We didn’t know that much about Gus. He had been single all his life, and spent some years traveling the world in the Merchant Marines. We never saw him making a move on any of the girls who danced there. Maybe that’s why they hired him.

*The Road to Golden*

From our underage vantage point of the kitchen counter, we could not see the announcer who informed the crowd that Missy was taking the stage. A raucous cheer went up, suggesting she had some followers in addition to Johnny. Missy was cute all right. Her jet black hair was piled up alluringly, with tendrils, giving her a somewhat Spanish style, complemented by a rose slipped through a knot. Her body was petite but still curvaceous and she had a single swirl of hair that came down perfectly situated between her perfectly shaped, milk-white breasts. The dress she usually wore, and had on that night was the go-go style, very short, pale yellow with glossy white vinyl boots. The dress had sparkles on it and refracted the strobe light that bounced off her, as The Beatles's "I Want to Hold Your Hand" blared.

When she finished, Missy looked in our direction and blew a kiss to Johnny who immediately returned it. You couldn't see the patrons very well because of the lighting, but that was okay with us and it allowed us to hang out without getting into trouble with the owners. Most of the guys there, Gus had told us, were usually just frustrated farmer hands and local business folk, who were escaping for a couple of hours from the pressures of their world. Who would deny them a peek at clothed young women flashing limited views of their supple thighs and breasts to the steady beat of the best rock and roll had to offer at the time?

I felt a little guilty being there, having led my mother to believe I was at teen club for the night. But before I could think back to her entrapment in our home, Johnny's loud hooting distracted me from the guilt. He was watching the next girl on stage, who danced listlessly, with no energy. The audience was clearly quieter than when Missy was performing.

*Dale M. DeVoss*

“Come on,” Johnny shouted. “Shake it! Do something up there!”

A couple patrons turned their heads sideways, not really making the effort to see who had shouted, but showing they had heard the catcall.

“What are you doing?” I asked in a hushed tone.

“She’s a lousy dancer. Can you believe they pay for this?”

“We didn’t pay anything,” I reminded him. “So, just let it go.”

“Eddie, you got to live life with a passion or there’s no point to it.”

Again, he turned his attention to the rather tired looking blonde girl, who barely seemed to have the energy to lift her arms past shoulder height.

“Fucking hell,” he yelled, louder than before, “will you dance or get off the goddamn stage!”

Now, despite the lack of lighting, I saw heads turn completely around and look in the direction of the kitchen. A couple of voices told us to shut the hell up.

“Quit it,” I warned in an insistent, low voice but Johnny never heard it. He was now responding to not only the dancer but those voices that had told him to stop.

“Don’t yell at me. The girl can’t even dance!”

*The Road to Golden*

Johnny lifted his middle finger in an obscene gesture to unseen opponents in a darkened room. I pushed his arm down, despite the fact that probably no one saw it. He yanked his arm away from me, annoyed that I was trying to control his behavior. A dark shadow descended on us. A tightness came to the pit of my stomach. I thought it might be an angry customer, ready to slam his fist into the face of the rude visitor who had belittled his favorite dancer, perhaps even his girlfriend. It came toward Johnny and me and I wondered if I might be mistaken for the intruder and suddenly feel the crunch of bone on bone, flesh smacking flesh. The outline of the shape became clear. It was Gus, and his face was taut with anger as he stared at Johnny.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Gus hissed, in a very untypical tone of voice. “I risk my job getting you guys in here and this is what you do? Are you out of your mind?”

In quieter voice, which I barely heard over the still blaring rock music, Johnny blithely said, “Not my fault if she’s a lousy dancer.”

Gus, who had always been kind to us, now shouldered me to the side as he stood in between Johnny and me. “You know what; you better get out of here before someone else comes over.”

“What are you talking about?” was Johnny’s reply.

“Right now,” Gus insisted and Johnny headed for the back door.

*Dale M. DeVoss*

I started to go around Gus to follow him but he restrained me by my arm and steered me toward the door but not outside. I looked out to see if I could spot Johnny but by this time, he was undoubtedly half way to the truck.

Gus looked intently at me, placed his hands on my shoulders and gave me a bit of a shake.

"Look here, kid," Gus began, and thought a moment, obviously not sure how to say what he had on his mind. His look softened as he finally felt the words come to him. "Johnny, well, he's older than you, and he is already wrapped up in his life, does what he wants to and doesn't always think about the consequences. Even though you're younger than him, you think about things."

Mild applause came from the room after the music had stopped. But I did not look away. I had no idea what Gus was trying to say, but the way he said it kept me still, entranced, wondering. As if realizing the intensity of this lecture, Gus looked down to his shoes and then back up at me, with a wry smile.

"Well, anyway, what I'm trying to say here is, well, you're a good kid. Johnny's a good kid, too, but he's not the kind who listens to advice. And I don't want to see you messing up your life, Eddie, you know?"

The announcer presented the next dancer and the next song began. It shook me out of my speechlessness.

"It's okay, Gus. I know what I'm doing. Johnny and I are tight, but I have my own mind."

*The Road to Golden*

Gus smiled. “So, if he jumped off a building, you wouldn’t do it too, right?”

“He’s my friend,” I explained. “I don’t worship him.”

Gus, apparently pleased by my response, gave me a big bear hug, lifting me slightly off the floor. But as I looked back, walking through the back door, Gus was still watching me, with a look of doubt crossing his usually cheery features.



## Chapter 3

Johnny and I rode in bumpy silence, away from the club, a bare sliver of a moon little help in illuminating us. Johnny expertly lighted another cigarette while temporarily steering the truck with his knees. It was odd about Johnny's outrageousness and Gus's sudden expression of concern about me. But I said nothing about it. It was Johnny's adventurous nature that took me far away from my home life, which had created our band, and, with his seemingly unlimited charm, brought women constantly into our circle. He considered Missy his girlfriend and the other girls he often found himself in bed with were in a different category. That, too, was something we never spoke about.

I knew this meant that we would go somewhere for about two hours until Missy would be getting off work. Then, we would head over to her parents house, both of whom worked the night shift. This thought was always a blessing for me because it meant there was a possibility of romance ahead. Missy often came back with another girlfriend and while Johnny and Missy were off in a bedroom, I had a chance at physical bliss, if the conditions were right, the girl was in the mood and I wasn't feeling too shy.

The sudden illumination of the barn where the dance was being held broke the mood in the truck and Johnny and I exchanged a smile of expectation. The weathered building had lights bouncing off of three of its sides, as if a Hollywood movie was about to premiere in the middle of a Michigan farm. Wild music poured forth from the barn. We heard the shouts of

*The Road to Golden*

the dancers inside, and as we approached, saw the shadows of those dancing projected largely on the barn walls.

Inside, we immediately spotted Gino, standing by the beer cooler with two girls wrapped around his arms. Neither was the one who had been with him at the A&W. They were a pair of little schoolgirl kittens, purring and rubbing up against Gino, trying to engage his affections. He just stood there stoic, rock solid, like a statue of John Wayne or some real-life hero of the Old West.

Johnny and I eased our way through the bodies. I kept my eye on Gino, who was staring back at me, holding my attention. Johnny, however, was being Johnny, smiling at every woman whose attention he could pull, whether she was alone, with a girl or with a boy. Then, all of a sudden, the strangest thing happened. Gino was wiggling his index finger at me to come over to him. There was no expression on his face. I stood there, at first totally confused by the gesture, for Gino would only talk to those people he thought were important to him and I never felt myself in that category. I turned to Johnny to see if he was reacting to Gino's summons, but Johnny was already moving through the dancers toward a woman who had returned his dazzling smile with one of her own.

I began to walk over to Gino and had the feeling of watching myself walk in a movie, seeing my tentative approach toward Gino from various camera angles, the music roaring. I felt myself inching towards him but not aware that my feet were moving. The lights inside shifted colors, unlike the all-white lights set up outside. It was eerie and at the same time very familiar to me. I had just seen Gino not long before, yet my knees were somewhat wobbly and I wished I could take a few

*Dale M. DeVoss*

minutes to have a beer, look over the action, before having to speak to him on my own.

Gino was slouched now, one leg resting on a bale of hay beneath him, the other leg keeping time to the music. His left arm was around one of the girls and the right was clutching a beer. His gaze, now that he saw I was coming, was directed over the heads of everyone else, as though he was seeing something that the rest of us couldn't. Now he looked right at me. I was almost right on top of him. He gave a signal to stop with the hand that had the beer in it.

"Okay, not so close, sonny. You's crowding my space here, huh?" Then he took a swig from his beer. He wiped his mouth with his right arm and then looked at me intently.

"Look, kid, I like you, you know, and well, I don't want you to get hurt or nuttin'. But you know that gang at the drive-in tonight?" Here he paused for effect.

I realized he was expecting me to say something. First, I bobbed my head up and down. Realizing that must have looked stupid, I tried to talk but my voice was dry and brittle.

"Yeah, you really told them, Gino. It was great."

He continued, "Well they ain't done with us yet, see? They'll be here later tonight and try and straighten things out. Know what I'm saying here?" Now, his head tipped down from his bale of hay throne and looked me right in the eyes.

I was speechless for what seemed like hours and then finally muscled up the courage to say,

*The Road to Golden*

“Johnny and I ain't scared, Gino. We'll help you fight those guys.”

Gino burst into a great roar of laughter that sent chills down my back.

“Oh, whoooo, did you hear that?” The girls giggled a little. “The kid wants to fight for me, ain't that somethin'?”

He raised his head up, looked at the barn's rafters and let out another blood curdling laugh. Even with the music blasting, some people nearby glanced over at us. Gino regained his composure, leaned in toward me again but now, his voice was like a loud whisper, more confidential, not at all glib.

“Look, kid, I appreciate your courage and all, but these guys, see they'll be coming with guns and knives and brass knuckles and all. My guys and their guys are going to go at it, probably back of the barn. It's no place for a kid, and besides if the goons (the word he used for cops), come, my ass will be cooked if they knew I had such a young kid on my side, *capiche?*”

He then tapped me on my shoulder a couple of times in a fatherly fashion and I knew that there would be nothing more to discuss. I raised my head up and thanked Gino for being so kind and he gave me a wink and I turned and left.

I had to go find Johnny now and that would be no easy task. I cruised through the dancers. I took a quick look outside. I had to wait in line to get a beer. The thought occurred to me that it was odd our band was named The Caretakers. That term, for a professional who dealt with the` sick and dead, seemed strange,

*Dale M. DeVoss*

even funny. How much care can you take with a stiff who can't feel anything any more? But now, I was trying to find Johnny, trying to take care of him. It was not one-sided. By having me as his friend, in his band, he took care of me too. But after the lectures from Gus and Gino, I was seeing a different way of interpreting our band name.

\*\*\*

Outside again, I was walking past long lines of parked cars. Out of frustration, I headed back to the truck and sure enough, from inside it, I could hear moaning and groaning. Now what? I gently leaned against the back of the truck and I looked up into the sky and I could see all of the constellations whose names Johnny had told me about, standing out in bolder relief because of a slice of a moon that was afraid to shine. But I couldn't concentrate on its beauty because the sounds of animal lust confined me to earth. I knew that we had to get the hell out of there, and fast. If the other gang didn't beat the crap out of us, then Gino would.

I moved away from the truck a few yards and started calling out Johnny's name, as if I was still looking for him. Johnny stuck his head out of the passenger's side window, his hair tousled, his eyes wild, and yelled,

"For Christ's sakes, Eddie, what in the hell are you doing out here?"

Now Johnny loved Missy, in his fashion, but I came to the conclusion that Johnny was addicted to sex, to chasing, entrancing, enveloping the opposite sex and in turn, girls

*The Road to Golden*

seemed to cling to him as well. Both Gino and Johnny had it, whatever “it” was and I just had to live with the fact the indefinable “it” was something that had evaded me. Missy herself would sometimes have other guys and that was the type of relationship they had. They couldn't live without each other, but when they couldn't be with each other, they simply found someone else.

“Johnny, we've got to get out of here, Gino pulled me aside and said there's going to be a rumble out here tonight and he wants us to get out of here.” There was a moment of silence and then Johnny pounded the metal ceiling of the truck three times.

“Shit! All right, man, give us a minute to get dressed.”

I politely moved toward the tailgate of the truck as, in the cab, arms and legs and clothes flailed about, making the truck rock a bit, back and forth, although with considerably less exertion than it had a few minutes before. Johnny fired up the engine, I hopped in and in a swirl of gravel, we were off again.

It was a comical sight, the three of us in the truck. The girl that Johnny latched onto at the party was all over him. He had a new cigarette dangling from his mouth. The smell of the smoke had not yet erased the scent of their bodies which clung to the worn vinyl seats. I avoided looking at them and did my job, to sort out the records for the player, pretending that I was nothing more than a disc jockey that had somehow been transported into their truck but still had to play music for all those tuning in.

“This here is the Eternal Energy Machine,” Johnny said to the girl, slapping his left palm on the outside of his door. “And

*Dale M. DeVoss*

this is my best friend,” he said, looking at me. Hearing the words, all the annoyance I had felt vanished.

“Eddie, this is Carla.”

“Carlene,” corrected the shapely, blonde girl, but she didn’t seem at all upset.

I guess I was Johnny’s best friend because I knew him better than anyone and put up with him more than anyone. And I knew what Johnny was going to do. He was driving to some remote spot to park the truck and make love to this lady he met. This meant that I would have to fend for myself. I didn’t really mind. It wasn’t the first time.

When Johnny pulled off the road, I said, as if on cue, “I’m going to take a walk.” I got out of the truck and reached behind the seat, finding another copy of Keats’s poems and a pen flashlight.

Carlene picked up immediately how accommodating I was being and purred a sweet thank you to me as I nodded and walked toward a small grove of nearby trees. Behind me, I heard the door slam and Carlene squeal and giggle.

To the squeaking of the truck, the gasps of the young lovers, the dim sounds of rock from the radio, I turned back to “Hyperion,” and entered its world again, seeing the visions of it in my mind:

*“Methought I stood where trees of every clime,  
Palm, myrtle, oak, and sycamore and beech,  
With plantain, and spice-blossoms, made a*

*The Road to Golden*

*screen, In neighborhood of fountains, by the  
noise, Soft-showering in my ears, and, by the  
touch Of scent, not far from roses.”*

I knew that we would be heading out soon enough, because we would have to be back in town to go to Missy's place.

The panting and heavy breathing of Johnny and his new friend could be heard in between notes but I found it no trouble to focus on Keats, on his tale of beauty and truth and aging and the cycles of life and death. It brought me comfort, even though I did admit to myself that I could not know the meaning of every phrase he wrote and desperately wanted to. But then, I thought about rock and roll, how some groups so moved people that they sang the songs when they played on the radio, on a record player and when they were lucky enough to see the group in person.

What was it, I asked myself, about the restless youth of night that they should have all these yearnings and sweaty aspirations anyway? Why couldn't they be content with going to school, working on a potato farm, playing the occasional gig, eventually to find a girl and settle down in the same town, and take over the family business? Was I destined for a holy path, a special destiny, out here in the woods reading Keats, with my companions only the occasional skunk or possum? If there was to be another truck full of kids coming down the road, they might be looking for a rumble, and then what? Could I fend them off with my book of poems? If they attacked and killed me, as I tried to defend the naked Johnny and Carlene, how would it change the rest of his life? What would I have missed if I died at this age?



*Dale M. DeVoss*

Anyway, Johnny broke my train of thought, shouting out,

"Come on, Eddie, get in the truck. We're moving out."

As he drove, Johnny was all hyped up and talking a blue streak, like he often did after making love to some girl.

"Now we're going to go into town and check out the Blue Note, see if Little Leon and his Caravan are playing. If they are, we're going to go in and catch some of that sweet soul music that'll tingle us right down to our love bones."

Carlene laughed her face flush with the radiance of sexual satisfaction.

\*\*\*

The Blue Note was where all the greasers in town hung out, and the bands that played there were all in the vein of Motown artists. Little Leon was very similar to Little Anthony and the Imperials, a terrific performer. The only problem that I could see in going there was the fact that Johnny's many women often hung out there. There had been more than one confrontation. Johnny took it in stride.

Inside The Blue Note, the guys had their hair slicked up in greaser fashion and the girls teased their hair toward the ceiling with lots of hair spray. Guys were required to do a sort of strut that showed coolness, often accompanied by light shoving and playful punching. Usually you didn't see any knives or brass knuckles, it being so dark and all, but you knew they were there.

*The Road to Golden*

This scene definitely took you back in evolution a couple hundred of years.

The Blue Note was an old movie theater that was gutted out for dances. You had to be very careful how you walked about in the utter darkness. There were usually couples making out in various spots and you didn't want to bump into them and get the guys mad. I don't recall ever seeing anyone that resembled a manager or guard there. No doubt, they feared for their well-being. This is not to say that the police wouldn't drop in from time to time, just to let you know they were close by, listen to a song or two, and keep an eye on former convicts who were out to find some trouble

When Little Leon and the Caravan hit the stage, there was much confusion everywhere. I had wandered off on my own now as Johnny and Carlene had found one of the dark corners to make out in. After the band belted out a couple of blues numbers, Johnny found me, with Carlene literally hanging onto him. He hugged her goodbye.

“But where are you going, Johnny?” Carlene asked coyly.

“Now, sweetie, you know I have to go pick up my sister at my stepfather's house, and we've all ready been through all this.”

In fact, Johnny and I had been through it more times than I wanted to remember. Sometimes, the story was about his mom being ill or his sister needing a ride or his stepfather being mad at him or the homework he didn't do. Johnny would take a deep drag of his cigarette, blow smoke rings in the air to show how

*Dale M. DeVoss*

nonchalant he was and then, after an embrace, he went out the door, with me mumbling goodbye to the girl and trailing after him.

“Just think, Eddie, me boy,” he said over the roar of the truck’s engine, once again, “in about five minutes, I’ll be hugging my sweetheart and she’ll be wearing the smallest of small nightgowns that she always wears for me.”

“What she wears for me,” I said, thinking of a rhyme, “to draw stares for me.”

“Good one,” he laughed, gunning the engine in approval.

\*\*\*

Just as we got to Missy’s house, Johnny brought out his flask of brandy and we took a couple pokes. We pulled up in a field adjacent to Missy’s house so we could sneak in the back door, like thieves in the night, while her parents were working the night shift. We used our usual commando skill to sneak past the neighbors’ lights, not slip on their slick, recently watered lawn

and dash to the back door before their dogs could sniff us or, if the dogs barked, be out of sight when someone popped a head outside a window.

I heard music playing already as we entered. It was Missy’s favorite song, "Cherish," by The Association. She ran into Johnny’s arms, wearing her little gown and as this song played over and over, she and Johnny did their ritual dance. The room was filled with candlelight and Johnny pushed his groin into hers as they moved to “Cherish.”

*The Road to Golden*

Johnny had told me that Missy was a “nymphomaniac” but she and her friend Pamela, who hung back in the shadows, also wearing a negligee, both liked to be known as “sex kittens.”

“Did you bring the Spanish Fly?” Missy purred and Johnny nodded. In fact, he couldn’t find it so he had bought a muscle relaxer, figuring correctly Missy didn't know the difference.

“Do you want to dance?” was the first words out of Pamela's mouth.

Pamela was okay, but not physically my type of girl. She was about five foot two, full bodied, with very large breasts. But, what the heck, I was there, and she was there, and the candles were going, the music playing, and she was ready for romance.

“Yeah, sure, we can dance. But first, how about a beer. I'm thirsty as hell.”

“Oh yeah, how rude of me, I'll go get one out of the fridge.” She quickly ran off to the kitchen.

I could see that Johnny and Missy wouldn't be with us much longer as already they were deep into the throes of their “sex dance.” Just as I had made my decision, Pamela came in with my cold beer.

I thanked her and went to grab for the beer, but Pamela pulled it away at the last moment and said, “First, you must do something for me,” She stood there with that look in her eyes that women get when they know they have the upper hand. She

*Dale M. DeVoss*

asked me if I could get her one of "those Spanish Flies" from Johnny. I explained I would try and she smiled with dreamy eyes that invited me to places I had rarely been.

I approached Johnny about the supposed Spanish fly. He actually gave me a wink when I asked him about it. Missy was pulling him toward the bedroom and he leaned over to me and whispered, "We have to be out of here in an hour and a half, lover boy."

Pamela and I started to dance and within minutes we were French kissing. Her tongue darted furiously through my mouth, sometimes taking my breath away. I didn't have to embarrassingly request she slow down. She stopped on her own.

Shelly, Missy's younger sister, who was eight years old, was peeking out of her bedroom door. Missy had assured us Shelly would never tell on us and she never had, but every once in a while, she spied on us. I made a hand motion for Shelly to go back inside her room, which she did and then I returned to Pamela, kissing her neck. I slowly moved my passion to her ear lobe and then the time was right.

"Let's go off to the bedroom, Pamela." She didn't put up a fight.

We kissed all the way down the hallway and just before we got to the target bedroom, I pinned her up against the wall. Now, I was licking the outer part of her ear and occasionally humming a few bars of one of our songs into it. This actually made her so weak in the knees that I had to catch her and pick

*The Road to Golden*

her up. I made a mental note to remember the song but in the heat of the moment, it would eventually escape me.

I then carried her off into the bedroom, threw both of us onto the bed and we both laughed giddily.

"I've been waiting to do this to you for a while. Did you bring little Mr. Raincoat?" she asked as she giggled.

I informed her that indeed I did bring the little guy and suggested that she put it on. I always thought it was more erotic for the woman to attempt this usually clumsy act. Even if she had trouble with it, it would feel pretty good.

Then came the act of tearing one another's clothes off, which in Pamela's case was easy because she was just wearing the small negligee. When I was removing her panties, I slid them ever so slowly down her legs, taking little breaks at certain times to rub our bodies together. Now, with all the musician sensitivity I could muster, I positioned my face between the thighs of Miss Pamela. I imagined my tongue as the neck of a guitar, swooping through the air as it was played by an expert rock guitarist. I gained more confidence as Pamela responded with an increased bucking of her hips. She was apparently a great lover of music.

We were making love for what seemed like a long time to me. But I did not want to ask what time it was, for fear she would get upset and all our pleasure would stop. She was on top now and I had already had an orgasm, but Pamela seemed to be still working up toward that momentous event. My manhood had worked itself back into a military salute, and I was trying everything I could think of, using every appendage I had, to

*Dale M. DeVoss*

stimulate Pamela. We rocked wildly, feverishly, and Pamela began moaning loudly. Her fingers dug deeply into my skin and Pamela collapsed on top me with a final surrendering gasp of joy. Lying there, I felt pleased that I had persevered, that I had found an unpredictable rhythm, angle and flow that made Pamela happy. But the sounds of our heavy breathing did not last long in the darkened room. There was a loud knock at our door.

"Eddie, quick!" Johnny appeared in the doorway, half dressed, his eyes wild. "Put your clothes on. Missy's old lady's home. Better leave through the window. You won't have time for anything else. I'll meet you outside by the bridge."

I thought my performance with Pamela had been fairly impressive but I doubted it had been an hour and a half. As I rapidly dressed, I whispered to Pamela to block the door. At the very worst, I could always dive under the bed. We heard faint voices in the hallway, then a door closed.

"Good night, dear," said Missy's mom.

It sounded promising enough to make a break for it, and I quietly slipped out of the bedroom window, giving Pamela a good night kiss before I jumped down. It felt like a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, sneaking out before the dawn, avoiding parents and all. Johnny told me all about the plays of Shakespeare. He told me that if I were to read all of Shakespeare's works, I would know all there is to know about human folly, greed and love. Well, he hadn't read them all and neither had I, but *Romeo and Juliet* seemed to say everything there was to say about deep, true love. I wondered what it

*The Road to Golden*

would be like to see the play done, maybe with rock music in the background.

These were my thoughts when I got to the mowed field but then the dogs started to bark. Then, a spotlight was turned on. It was the kind of light that cops use on their cruisers. A voice shattered my progress.

“Stop or I’ll shoot! I know you’re out there and the cops are on their way.”

It must have been Missy’s father. And he must have thought I had been with Missy. I began to tiptoe but the crunch of some leaves gave away my general position. There were shots fired in the air. Other houses in the distance began turning on lights. If I die tonight, I thought to myself, at least I will have died after making love.

It was a fast crawl that took me to middle of the field. Then, I stood and ran as fast I could to where Johnny’s truck would be—or should have been. It was gone. But then I heard the engine gunned maybe thirty yards away. Johnny had anticipated a quick getaway and had already had the truck ready to take off. I started running. Another gun shot split the air but Missy’s father was firing in frustration. The truck was slowly pulling away as the right side door flew open, I jumped in, slammed it and Johnny floored it.

\*\*\*



*Dale M. DeVoss*

As we tore down the main drag, we could see that the cops were coming down from the other side. Johnny, as usual, had this all figured out and headed for a two lane dirt road that ran along the main creek in town. About five hundred feet down this trail he cut the engine, and we rolled down a little valley which led to a small dumping ground.

We were quite secluded now. Johnny pulled out the flask of brandy and we drank to friendship and the bonding effect of near-death experiences.

“I’ll tell you Eddie,” he sighed, “why is it a guy can’t even see the girl he loves without the whole world coming unglued.” He shook his head from side to side. I took another hit from the brandy and knew that Johnny was asking this question and didn’t expect an answer.

After quite a long silence, Johnny asked, “So, how was it with Pamela?”

I was glad it was dark. I felt like I was blushing. “Fine.”

“Fine, huh?”

“Yeah, you know. It was great. I don’t talk about it like you do. It’s not my thing.”

Johnny let that sink in. Then, he chuckled. “Shit, Eddie, you must have looked pretty funny running across that field, like some kind of jack rabbit who has the hound dog on his ass.” We both looked at each other and burst out laughing.

*The Road to Golden*

It seemed as though we had enough adventure for one night and were more than satisfied to head home. The very fact that it would be dawn in a couple of hours seemed to help solidify this feeling. I asked Johnny what he planned on doing about Carlene, who undoubtedly expected to see him again, if not later that night, then another night.

Johnny didn't look at me but pulled real hard on his cigarette.

"Eddie, me boy, you have to understand that some things are just understood. She knows deep down inside that there never was going to be a later meeting. Yet, there will be another meeting between us. We both knew that when I left her at The Blue Note, she would just follow whoever to wherever and would be okay."

With this pronouncement, he blew his cigarette smoke out of the window, and that was that. I wondered if Pamela felt that way about me. I wasn't sure what I felt. I wanted to be like Johnny but knew I was different in so many ways. How could one battle his own nature?

\*\*\*

The jumbled evening and confused feelings had deeply exhausted me and I feel quickly asleep when I finally, quietly, snuck into my room and slipped under the covers. I was hoping to sleep in a little bit in the morning, sleep off the drinking and making love and running through the fields. But the bursting open of my door in the early morning light told me that I was going to catch extra winks another time. My father stood in the

doorway, his eyes ablaze and I propped myself up on one elbow and rubbed my eyes, trying to get ready for yet another confrontation

“I went to bed at midnight, boy, and you weren’t here. I want to know right now where you were and who you were with.” My father was now standing over me, dressed to go to work, his fists clenched, his face flushed with anger.

“Went out with Johnny,” my voice croaked, and just the sound alone made me sound guilty somehow.

“You were playing music again, weren’t you?” he yelled. “I told you, I won’t have you playing music—“

“I was listening to music. I wasn’t playing it,” I interrupted him. “You don’t let me play, you don’t let Mom play. Do you mind if I just listen to someone else play? Or does everyone have to be miserable in this house?”

I might have been all right if I had left off the last sentence. But now, I was fully awake and getting angrier. His efforts to ensure we had no joy had now extended to the precious moments I was away from him.

“It’s my house,” he growled, “and you can live on the damn potato farm or with your worthless friend Johnny if you don’t like it here.”

With that, he began rummaging through my belongings, searching behind books, under furniture, scavenging. I knew what he wanted but I asked anyway. He didn’t answer me, just kept on, occasionally hurling paper or books in one direction or

*The Road to Golden*

another. When he stopped suddenly, I knew it was a bad sign. He reached under some papers and found a reel of audio tape

“That’s not new,” I protested. “It’s some old songs Johnny and I”—

He was at me so suddenly; I didn’t have time to protect myself. My father had the tape in one hand and a fist full of my hair in the other, dragging me out of bed and then flinging me to the floor.

“I can give you an honest profession, one in which you do something of value. I offered you the chance to work with me. If you want to throw your life away with Johnny, drinking and playing that stupid rock and roll, then you’re headed for a horrible future and no one will be able to help you.”

I had hit the floor hard and rubbed my back and side where I landed. I looked up at him, with contempt, but also pity, because I knew his life must have been very unhappy, which is why it bothered him that I had any pleasure at all.

“I’m not going to spend my whole life with Johnny,” I said. “But I’m also not going to spend my whole life selling cars. You decided your own life. I have a right to decide mine.”

“Not while you live with me you don’t!” He looked at me, smashed the reel on the floor and then turned away, in disgust. I heard him storm outside and the front door thundered closed. I picked up the broken reel and rewound the tape that had started to unravel.

*Dale M. DeVoss*

My mother peeked in. “Are you all right?” she asked in a quiet and pained voice.

“I’m fine,” I said, sitting on the floor. “Nothing’s stronger than poetry and music.”

This coming of age novel takes place in the 1960's.

The Road to Golden

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/3901.html?s=pdf>