

Johnny Dynamite

Part One

Miss Beverly wasn't inclined towards Johnny Dynamite. For one, his name was ridiculous. It wasn't his real name. It was a nickname. But no one called him Johnny or Dynamite either, just Johnny Dynamite. This was besides his parents who called him John, and when his mother was upset with him, Jonathon Willis Dupree.

Miss Beverly's distaste wasn't because she knew anything about Johnny Dynamite, besides how he looked standing in front of her, wearing a cut off plain white t-shirt, cut off jean shorts, and a pair of worn out gray New Balance running shoes. But she could tell there was trouble on her front porch. She felt she had a knack for guessing character.

The reason Johnny Dynamite was standing on her front porch resided in the fact that this sixteen-year-old boy was the object of her only child's affection. Her daughter had made plans with him to hike some trail. Miss Beverly was pleased when Darla asked permission to do this. She wasn't pleased anymore. Believing that she understood her daughter quite well, since she saw a lot of herself in the fourteen-year-old, she knew that Darla's disposition was partial towards the good for nothing bad boy. Miss Beverly knew this because she herself was drawn to the type. Her former husband had been the type. He was dead now, hit by a UPS driver. She had not benefitted in any way from the delivery corporation's mishap. A lawsuit was deemed fruitless. Miss Beverly's late husband had been plastered drunk at the time.

She asked Johnny Dynamite in her long drawl like way of saying things, "You like school?"

He replied, unable to look her in the eyes (she took this as a bad sign, that he was lying), "Yes ma'am."

She tried to be tricky, "What's your favorite subject?"

He still didn't look at her, but turned his eyes towards the street to watch a power walking, arms swinging in unison, middle-aged couple. They were wearing matching fluorescent green jogging outfits, and Johnny Dynamite thought they looked funny, since they did.

"I like computers...and history, I guess."

Miss Beverly's tone was a bit harsh, "You guess?"

"No ma'am. I do like computers, a lot...um...and history."

"I don't know much about computers, but I like history too. It's good, learning where you come from. But what I hear on the TV though...they're teaching kids now what didn't really happen. Can you believe that?"

Johnny Dynamite didn't reply. He didn't know how to.

The next few minutes consisted of an awkwardness that Miss Beverly rarely experienced, due to her character trait/ability in being able to talk about everything, even if she didn't know anything about the topic of discussion.

She couldn't take it anymore, "You play sports?"

Johnny Dynamite's gaze caught hers just briefly enough for it to be noticed, before drifting to the chipped blue paint porch floor, "Nope."

"Well...what do you do?"

He answered quickly, "I like movies."

"Huh? Everybody likes movies."

"My dad don't."

"Well...that doesn't matter. What kind of movies do you like?"

"I don't think you've seen 'em."

Miss Beverly took offense to this statement.

"Try me," she curtly demanded.

His eyes moved to the chipped white paint porch ceiling, "How 'bout *The Dawn of The Never?*"

She had no knowledge of the movie, and her lack of a response prompted Johnny Dynamite to say another along with a few more.

"Time and Time and Eternity, or A Wood and A Fire Man. There's Life as an Oyster. Um...Money Over and Under Mind?"

She interjected before he could continue, "I think I heard of the second one."

But Miss Beverly hadn't heard of the second one, and Johnny Dynamite knew it. A person suddenly poked out their head and yelled from the back of the Toyota Camry that was Johnny Dynamite's transportation for the afternoon.

“What’s takin’ y’all so long?”

She was rather shocked when she recognized the boy. It was Bradley McDermott, the son of the mother who was the president of her daughter’s high school’s PTA.

Miss Beverly waved, “Why Bradley McDermott? Is that you?”

She knew it was him and continued to wave her hand, “I know your mother. Tell her Janice says hello.”

It was obvious that the seventeen-year-old boy didn’t know who she was. Still, there was a smile on her face now. She wondered to herself, her hand having only just then returned to the back of her neck, wiping the growing sweat from it, why her daughter couldn’t fancy someone like Bradley McDermott.

Really though, she didn’t know that much about the boy. For instance, she was entirely unaware that Johnny Dynamite was Bradley’s first cousin, since their mothers were sisters. What she did know was that Bradley’s father was the lead manager at the local factory, which specialized in non-stick plastic glue containers. She also knew that aside from being in charge of the PTA, Bradley’s mother handled her wine well. At least Miss Beverly had heard this from one of her coworkers who played doubles tennis with Mrs. McDermott every Tuesday. It was true that Bradley’s mother didn’t have a job, but Miss Beverly didn’t hold this against her, like her aforementioned coworker did. She wouldn’t have worked either if the option were available.

The screen door opened and out stepped Darla. It just so happened that, besides the shoes, her clothes matched Johnny Dynamite’s perfectly. She was wearing a white spaghetti strap shirt and short, blue jean shorts. Her shoes were perfectly clean, bright yellow Nike’s. Originally, Darla hadn’t been wearing the outfit, but when she saw Johnny Dynamite walk up, she changed in order to perhaps convince him that they were soul mates, or at least give the two of them something to talk about.

The moment he saw Darla, there was a subtle grin on Johnny Dynamite’s face. Miss Beverly noticed this, and that he was able to look into her daughter’s eyes. She stared at the two of them and tried to come up with some excuse to keep her daughter home. Nothing presented itself.

As they drove off, Miss Beverly thought out loud that it was always best to learn from one’s mistakes anyways. That’s how she had lived. She felt she had turned out all right.

Part Two

“Yo...cuz...you got somethin’ to drink?”

JD didn’t take his eyes off the road, but reached down towards the floor of the passenger side of the car (his hand accidentally brushed against Darla’s bare leg,

giving them both a momentary feeling frenzy) and picked up a plastic bottle of yellow Gatorade. Without looking towards the backseat, he held up the radioactive looking liquid towards Bradley.

“Nah man, I don’t want no Gatorade. Y’all got anythin’ hard to drink?”

Without emotion, JD answered, “No.”

Bradley crossed his arms and whined, “Why the hell am I hangin’ with kids?”

The reason the cousins were hanging out was because both of their mothers had forced them to do so. Bradley’s mother thought Bradley had been spending too much time with the wrong crowd, which he had been. JD’s mother thought he hadn’t been spending enough time with anyone besides Darla, which was the case entirely. Neither of them liked the other. This aversion had started when JD was five, Bradley six, during Christmas. Bradley had purposefully stepped on a Star Wars Lego model of the Millennium Falcon. JD had spent four hours putting together the puzzled block pieces after pulling it out from under the tinsel covered tree. A moment later JD’s retaliation came in the form of a t-ball aluminum bat, which Bradley had unwrapped hours earlier. The five-year-old Jonathon Willis Dupree swung with all his might, right into the stomach of Bradley McDermott, and caused him to vomit cranberry sauce everywhere. They had hated each other ever since.

JD glanced towards Darla. If she had known he was looking at her, she would have stared back in that innocent “I love you more than breathing” kind of way. But her eyes were looking out the passenger window at the brown, dead fields, as they rolled by.

Darla and JD were at that awkward stage of youth, and hence their relationship was just as awkward. Three weeks previously they had kissed for the first time. JD had just gone for it out of nowhere, in the library of all places, while she was reading *The Bell Jar* for a school assignment. They kissed again later that night. The second lasted a much, much longer time. It was the first time JD had kissed a girl, as in tongue action and not just some peck on the lips. It was the fourth time Darla had been kissed this way.

“Last night, I went over to Joey’s. Now he knows how to party! Dawn stole a eighteener from his daddy, probably gonna get whipped for it. I got drunk. You ever been drunk cuz?”

JD didn’t answer.

“Whatever cuz...Joey started tossin’ full cans of Mountain Dew in the fire. We all stood ‘round it till they popped, and whoever got too scared to stand there had to take off some of their clothes. But it wasn’t gay. There were girls there too. Becka was. Shit, she’s got the biggest tits I’ve ever seen in my life.”

JD turned around, “Shut up Bradley.”

“Oh, sorry cuz...didn't know there was a child in the car with virginal ears...shit.”

Yes, JD and Darla were at that awkward stage where neither really knew how to talk to the other. Even now, Darla was trying her hardest to think of something to say. JD would've been too, if his thoughts hadn't been distracted by the intense hate he felt for his cousin.

When the young and in love couple first met, during gym class, JD, being about as chivalrous as one could be in gym class, dove in front of Darla, saving her from a thrown dodge ball. He not only saved her, but caught the ball. He didn't do this to win her affection, but in order to win the game. Regardless of his intentions, she fell in love immediately. That night she found him on Instagram. She took a picture of a note, in which she had written in beautiful cursive, “Thank you for saving my life.” The note was taped to a dodge ball. She made sure that he would see it, and when he did, he fell in love. The next day, he walked up to her lunch table and, in front of fifteen girls, asked her if she wanted to go to Sonic with him. She said yes. Later that night, after a conversation about the word slushy, they became inseparable, going on for two whole months now.

“I heard that Coach D. likes to pretend that he don't know when the girls are changin', and so gets a quick peak at them all the time. Hell, I would too if I were him. He's gotta get what he can get, like my daddy says. Coach Kryer always yells at him at football practice. He calls him stupid to his face cause he is stupid...always apologizin', runnin' 'round like a chicken with no head. I'd hate to be stupid. My daddy says that he—“

JD interrupted, “—Shut up Bradley.”

Bradley leaned forward in the backseat, “We got a problem cuz? If you want, you can stop this car. I'll kick your ass if you want? You want me to kick your ass in front of your virginal ears girlfriend?”

JD's voice raised, “What happened last time you tried to kick my ass Bradley?”

Bradley didn't respond and leaned back again.

JD's voice became emotionless once more, “Now if you want, I can turn around and get you home...if you want?”

“Shit man...my mom says I won't get no allowance if I don't hang out with you today. She says you got no friends and need some, but that you're a good kid...I think you're a piece of shit.”

JD tapped the brakes, pulled over along the side of the road and switched off the engine. He turned around in his seat and stared at Bradley without saying a word. Bradley was unable to keep his cousin's gaze and looked out the window into the darkness of the woods that now surrounded the single lane, paved road, "Shit man...didn't mean no offense."

JD started the car back up. He sent a smile Darla's way. It was supposed to symbolize that he was sorry she had to deal with his first cousin. She didn't understand the implicit gesture. Regardless, she smiled back.

When JD's mother found out he had a girlfriend she had been ecstatic to say the least. But when she realized who Darla was, more specifically that she was the daughter of the man who had gotten himself hit by the UPS truck, she didn't approve. Likewise she had met her mother, who she felt talked too much. She tried explaining to JD that it was good thing that he had a girlfriend, but that most people didn't have the family life like he did. She didn't want him to get his hopes up. His father, on the other hand, was indifferent of the matter. So when JD's mother pleaded with him to talk some sense into his only child, he clicked off the TV, kissed her, rolled over in bed, and whispered the words "I love you". He fell asleep within the next two minutes, in spite of his wife continuing on, voicing out loud her complaints.

They parked the car in a small dirt lot. There weren't any other cars. Not many knew of the spot anymore. The three of them began the four mile up hill hike along a winding ill kept trail that led to a rock quarry. It had been filled with water after the mining company ran into an underground river. The surrounding forest was made up of pine trees and little else. There was a feeling of stillness about it. The quiet, only breached by the birds and Bradley, who occasionally cussed about the mosquitos and how his flip flop wearing feet hurt. Darla and JD held hands for all of it. The pointless chatter of their third party member was inconsequential to the mood that resided between the two of them.

Tall rocks of stone surrounded the water filled quarry. Trees had grown up along the edges of the rocks. The scenery was beautiful, besides the stagnant, glossy phlegm looking water. There was no outlet for it. So the water sat, simmering in the sun, growing more and more vile.

There once had been a false rumor that a car was in it, a skeleton still in the driver seat. The story went that the person had upset the local mob members back in the sixties. Thirty years prior, a few scuba divers had searched for the car. The quarry was deep enough that they were unable to reach the bottom.

There were thorn bushes, wildflowers, and a large patch of mushrooms along the upper ridge of the quarry, which were at one point thought to be of the psychedelic nature, planted by hippies. However, this had been forgotten, just like the car.

There were three points, along its sides, which were used to jump into the disgusting water. There were only three, since jumping from any other spot meant your legs would most likely clip a rock, shattering one or both of them. The first point was nothing more than a fifteen-foot drop. There was nothing dangerous

about it, nothing exciting about it. But when the trail ended, this fifteen-foot leap of immediate gratification was the first place one came upon.

The second point was reached by walking uphill, along the edge of the quarry for a few minutes. After hopping over a small crevice, there was a natural ridge which jutted out, therefore allowing the jumper to avoid the rocks protruding from the stone walls. It was a forty-foot drop.

The third point was a bit of a trek. Instead of hopping over the crevice, one walked past it. There was a small trail after this, which led through a thick group of pine trees. A twenty-foot wall of rock then presented itself. One had to scale it. However, the wall had been chipped at over the years, and there were now easy to climb steps fashioned into it. After the wall, came another trail that led to the edge of the highest point of the quarry. If one jumped, they would fall exactly sixty-seven feet, and nine more inches, into the water.

When the three of them reached the first point, JD immediately removed his shirt and without a sound dove headfirst into the water. Bradley followed suit, taking off his shirt, but he didn't jump into the water. He stood there watching Darla, and stated, "I gotta get my tan on."

JD had failed to mention to Darla that swimming would be involved, since he hadn't planned on swimming. He hadn't planned on Bradley being present either, as his mother had demanded that he take his cousin just that morning. All JD wanted was to show Darla the quarry. He had come to the spot dozens of times. His father had shown it to him, and even during their first date at Sonic, JD had expressed that he wanted Darla to see it.

The humidity, mixing with the ninety four degree weather, along with the physical exertion of the hike, had enticed JD with the anticipation of water enveloping him. But the situation left Darla a little unnerved. She didn't want to take off her shirt in front of Bradley and understandably so.

Bradley didn't help at all, "Girl! You gonna take off your shirt? You should! Haha...don't worry, I'll turn 'round."

Darla looked towards JD. He sensed her dilemma, and swam towards the edge, a little further down from the first spot, hoisting himself up in pull up fashion. He walked up to them, dripping water, constantly tugging up on his slipping beltless pants.

"Shut up Bradley. Darla, you don't gotta take off your shirt. I didn't know I was gonna swim."

Bradley's voice gave away his disappointment, "Shit...I didn't mean nothin' by it cuz."

JD didn't reply to this. Instead, he laid down on the hot rocks, with his hands behind his head. Darla, relieved, did the same, and situated herself next to him so that their legs were barely touching. Bradley was disgruntled.

He said out loud, "A god damn third wheel."

There was silence. Darla and JD stared up into the cloudless sky, and like all teenage lovers, they were under the impression that something pivotal was going on inside of them. Both felt angelic. Each of them could hear the other breathing, and as is often the case with young love, neither could think of a moment when they were happier. Their hands clasped, and Bradley, seeing the action, being the kind of person he was, came up with an idea.

"Hey cuz...ever jumped off that cliff?"

"Yeah."

"You bullshittin' me."

JD pushed himself up and onto his elbows, which forced him to release his hand from Darla's. He looked at his cousin, "I'm no liar."

"I'm just sayin' ...I think you should prove it."

"Why?"

"Don't wanna look like a pussy in front of your girl do ya?"

"Shut up Bradley."

"I'm just sayin' ...how 'bout this. I give you forty bucks to jump off that cliff. I don't believe you got the balls to do it."

"You ain't got no forty bucks Bradley."

"I sure do. Right here in my pocket. How 'bout this. I'll give it to your girl, and if you jump, and don't die, she can give it to ya. And if you don't, she'll hand it back...and you don't gotta give me nothin'."

The allure of forty dollars was too much for JD to pass up. As his father was a maintenance man at the local minor league baseball stadium, two towns over, and since his mother only worked three days a week at the library, due to her self diagnosis in not being able to handle the stress of a full time occupation, cash was something he was not accustomed to having. JD had a job. He was employed by a local car wash called *Mr. Duper's Super Duper Car Wash*. But given the economic climate of not just the town, but the whole state, Mr. Duper was only able to give JD two six hour shifts a week. The rest of Mr. Duper's employees were around the age of forty and most of them had families to feed. Adding to this, almost all of JD's paycheck went towards either his car insurance or cell phone bill. Extra, care free, spending money was a commodity he rarely experienced.

JD looked at Darla. The cash could get them into a movie and pay for popcorn. They could smuggle in a couple of sodas and have enough left over for ice cream afterward. Darla met his eyes. There was worry in them.

JD asked her, "You cool with that?"

After a brief hesitation, she replied, "Sure."

He stood up and walked over to Bradley, "You got yourself a deal."

Bradley pulled out from his khaki short's pocket a wallet. He had etched into the leather "Get Rich Or Die Trying" with a hunting knife. After removing his bi-weekly allowance of five crisp twenty dollar bills, he unfolded them slowly. Just as slowly, he flipped them over and over in his fingers in order to make sure JD was aware of how many green pieces of paper there were. He held two out for JD, and when JD reached for it, he pulled it back.

"Whoa there cowboy...I'm gonna give it to her. I don't want you runnin' off with my hard earned cash."

Darla was still lying on the ground. Bradley walked towards her, and hovering over her, dropped the two twenties onto her stomach. He laughed.

"Let's see how much balls you got, cuz!"

JD looked at the money. He thought for a moment that perhaps it was a bad idea to leave Darla alone with Bradley. He shook off the sensation, remembering the preview he had seen a week back for the remaking of *Apocalypse Now*. He turned towards the cliff and began to walk.

Part Three

It didn't take long for Bradley to break the silence and start talking to Darla.

"You scared girl? You think he's gonna die? You better pray he don't die."

She didn't respond and wouldn't look at him. Her eyes were focused on the cliff, the spot from which JD would jump.

"If he do, then you stuck with me."

He paused. She still didn't respond. He continued, "It's gonna take him a little bit to get up there. You wanna swim?"

She shook her head no.

“Don’t matter. I don’t really wanna swim anyways. I just was tryin’ to get you to...ya know you got nothin’ to be ‘shamed of. You look good. There’s no need to be shy ‘bout it. I don’t know why you messin’ with my cuz. No one likes him. He’s weird. Everybody thinks it. Even his folks think it.”

Darla noticed that he had taken a step towards her. She stayed in place. But when he took another step forward, she stepped back. Bradley took note of the action.

“He’s gonna be up there for a while. It’s just me and you now. Ya know, my daddy taught me somethin’.”

Bradley paused for emphasis and then continued, “He says that if I want somethin’, I gotta grab it, gotta take it by force...if I really, really want it, I mean. And girl...right now, I really, really want you. Know what I mean?”

Darla took another step back.

“How ‘bout this...I give you twenty bucks, and you take your shirt off. You don’t even gotta take your bra off, just your shirt. How old are ya?”

She took another step back.

“It don’t matter. What do ya think? How ‘bout forty? I’ll give ya forty dollars! Think of all you could do with forty smackers! No? I’m not gonna give you sixty. That’s all the dough I got.”

Bradley’s hands moved to his hips. His eyes shifted towards the cliff. He was contemplating something. He suddenly looked at her and took another step forward.

“Alright...sixty.”

Her breathing increased.

“Girl...I’m gonna get what I want. I always get what I want.”

As she took another step backwards, Darla’s eyes frantically looked up towards the still empty, JD less, cliff. She very nearly stumbled over a large, dead branch, and after she saw it, she picked it up and waved it at the still encroaching Bradley.

He laughed.

“I like it when girls play hard to get. Makes me want them more. What you gonna do girl? What you gonna do? You can’t hardly hold it up!”

At this very moment JD stood up on the cliff. The situation might have turned out entirely differently if Bradley or Darla had known this. But as Darla's focus was now entirely set on fending off Bradley, and Bradley's focus was entirely on Darla, JD's presence was left unknown. However, JD was able to see quite well how his girlfriend, the love of his life, was continuing to move backwards, waving a large piece of wood, almost as long as she was, while his cousin kept moving closer. It was obvious that something was wrong. He gave a quick glance into the water. It was far below.

Standing, unprotected, more than sixty feet in the air is a terrifying experience. Jumping from the distance is of course all the more terrifying. JD's heart began to pound. His blood churned. His pulsed raced. He knew it was always better not to look before jumping, but he did so in order to make sure nothing was floating on the surface that could impale him. He briskly took five steps back and then sprinted towards the edge. He jumped.

Bradley lunged at Darla. Whether or not he was actually going to attempt something, only Bradley could know. Perhaps he was only toying with her. Perhaps he simply wanted to scare her. Perhaps he was trying to make Darla feel helpless, as he himself felt helpless, toyed with, and terrified whenever his father fell off the wagon and beat him every month or so. But then again, Bradley's words and actions suggested that whatever it was going on in his head, it wasn't good.

With this in mind, no one could hold it against Darla when she swung the dead tree branch. No one could hold it against her that Bradley lost his balance trying to dodge the decayed limb. No one could hold it against her that when he stumbled, he slipped on some loose sediment and fell backward, smacking the back of his head on a large rock. No one could hold it against her when his unconscious body began to slide down the slope towards the water. No one could hold it against her that when his head hit another rock hanging out from the quarry wall, it killed him.

She watched, as the body bobbed and began to float. Her legs crumbled beneath her, and when her knees came in contact with the stone, she started to cry. JD was less than thirty yards from Bradley's body, when it reached the surface of the grimy water. He hadn't seen a thing. His face planted into the water, swimming like an Olympian, caring more for speed than about watching what was taking place. He didn't quite know how to take it when he did look up for the first time, and there, directly in front of him, was his lifeless, dead man floating cousin.

By the time JD was able to pull out the body, Darla wasn't crying anymore. He checked his cousin's pulse. There wasn't one. JD performed CPR so he could be honest that he at least attempted to save Bradley's life. But after he was sure his cousin was dead, he stopped and walked over to Darla. He sat down next to her. It was quite clear what happened. He didn't need an explanation and so didn't ask for one. She was detached at first. But right before she placed her head into his chest, Darla sobbed out, "I'm sorry."

He replied, "Not your fault."

They stayed there in the huddled position, holding each other, sitting in the sun. The birds were noisily singing. The wind had picked up. JD was cold. Darla felt the shivering and held onto him all the more tightly.

Five minutes passed. JD was trying to figure out how they'd get the body back to the car or if they should call someone. But while he looked across the water, bright light shining through the vibrant green colored needles of a separated from the pack pine tree, he suddenly had a thought. What caught his attention was the brownish pile at its base, decomposing on the ground.

He said the thought out loud, "A shame really. Sometimes people get the chance to change."

Darla started to cry again.