



John Hovorka's First Novel

It is about the independent rock and roll scene of the 1980's.

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Here's what Metal Snowball Press, the publisher of this book says:

Hippie Johnny, a local "rock star" in the medium-size city of Carthage, Ohio, decided to change his name to Johnny Wylde and seek his fortune far from home. At first, despite his immense creativity and his very good band, he could barely get as far as Indianapolis. He knew that his music was good enough to take him to the top, but he found that being excellent at what he did was not nearly enough to get him there. With great self-conscious effort, but also in ways he could have never foreseen, he took on the challenge of changing himself into the kind of person who could get the job done.

And here is an excerpt from from this novel, from the first chapter, which is called "Severance Pay":

Around eight at night I drove The Belted Radial's equipment van straight into the decaying industrial backwaters of Carthage, Ohio. I took The Skyway, up over massive oil refineries and steel mills. The tires screeched as I took the exit on to Iroquois Boulevard, a strip of used tire stores, gas stations, and grimy motor lodges. Iroquois started in the suburbs and ended down by the Lake Erie docks. Jesus Just Left Chicago by ZZ Top roared out of my radio. I was pounding out the beat on the steering wheel. Man, I was feeling so wild. I had never felt so good in my life.

The Belted Radials were going nationwide, and I was proud of it. It was gonna be great to just get the hell out of town, go out on our first major tour, and hopefully never come back. We'd

struggled long and hard to get as far as we did. After all we'd been through, this could be the big payback. Anyhow, I'd been waiting for this chance ever since I was fourteen years old.

So it was Saturday night, and I was ready to play some rock and roll. For better or worse, it was a last minute booking at some trashy dating bar in the inner city heart of Carthage, Ohio, a place called Heartbreak City. It wasn't a venue to be proud of, but they paid well. A gigantic lit up broken heart loomed over the bar. There were tables and chairs all over the place that looked like they had just been dumped off the back of a truck. The chairs were slightly bent up wiry things that skittered across the floor if you sat down on them too hard. Needless to say, I wasn't expecting too much from this scene.

The aptly named Knights In the Drunk Tank were opening, The Kings of Poland featuring Roarin' Joe King were closing, and we were in middle. Getting the middle set didn't sound all that great to us, but The Kings were a huge draw, and they had discovered this place to begin with. The Kings of Poland were our "hated rivals" on the local circuit. Roarin' Joe King, their singer, was a thirty-five year old fat-faced slob, and I swear he could not sing his way out of a paper bag. Why, he was twice as crude sounding as me.

But he really had a way with the dancing and partying crowd that had evolved from the Carthage hardcore punk scene of a few years before. They attracted huge mobs of post-punk rockers coming from as far away as Archtown and Erie, and they were the best thing that could happen to a bar. Their crowd was mainly into heavy drinking. Ours was more into wild dancing, and all-round all night partying.

Knights In The Drunk Tank weren't bad, although I was unable to take their singer, Hoagy Rock, all that seriously. He leaped around yelling, trying to drive the audience into a frenzy. They looked at him and looked at each other and laughed. But eventually about five songs in, the crowd started dancing to the muscular R&B that his band put out.

When Knights In The Drunk Tank were done, we did a feverishly quick stage set-up, then spent three minutes off stage waiting for the music coming over the p.a. system to end. Finally we bounded up onto the stage. Some woman in the audience screamed. It was Jane. She always screamed when she liked a band. People were yelling, "Hey, crank it up!" It was a commotion out there.

I strode up to the mike and said, "Hey, how're y'all doin' tonight? This is a real big night for all of us bands. I can't say how big yet. Y'all love them Knights In The Drunk Tank? I sure do! Hoagy, Rosco, an' all you guys, here's to ya. And here's to The Kings! Yeah, The Kings! Yeah, Roarin' Joe King and The Kings of Poland are yet to come. But hey, we are The Belted Radials, and this one is called She Got The Stuff!"

Buzz our lead guitarist mumbled, "Hey, Hippie Johnny, just shut up!" He slammed out some raving loud guitar intro, and we were off. I held back a little for about a verse. Then as soon as I had a solid feeling of the audience, who did for sure approve, we got down to giving them the rockin' business as best we knew how. Rosco pounded the drums. Neil nailed down some heavy bass. I felt the feeling beginning to come over me, that feeling that makes ya rock from the inside. Buzz nodded with vague, poker-faced approval, then we launched into a grinding slam-rocker I wrote called Night Girl. The dance floor filled up with people from all over. It was turning into some kind of wild night. We kept going and going, chugging out song after song, surrounded by all our loudest and drunkest fans. I knew a show like this would probably disgust my girlfriend, Estelle. As it was, I couldn't see a single one of her pals out in the audience. It was strictly the drunks. So we almost instinctively avoided doing anything that could be considered self-consciously creative. There would be no Pick Up Newspapers In The Streets or Is Love Supposed To Be. In this set it was She Turn It Over, Bing Bong There's A Party Goin' On, and Gimme The High-Test Booze. And maybe we'd segue from that into Hundred Proof, Raise The Roof! Then it was cover songs. We did a crazy mix of Ronnie Hawkins, Aerosmith, Muddy Waters, ZZ Top, Hank Ballard, and Charlie Rich. Our audience, was like putty in our hands, here down deep in the heart of my home town. Stomping, screaming, shoving, sweating. There we were, exactly where we wanted to be, in the vortex of our very own mob.

A large scary looking punk girl named Yvonne, who was barely wearing clothes, mascara gone running all over her pouty face, moved right up to the edge of the stage. She grabbed me, gave me a gigantic hotly sexual smooch, then dragged me right off that stage. I kept on playing. She kept on kissing.

She whispered in my ear, "Hey, Hippie Johnny, we're partying at The Indian Point Hotel tonight, Suite 107. Please come over after the show. We've got a lot of whiskey. It'll be fun. You know what I mean."

She looked me in the eye very meaningfully as she said that. I knew perfectly well what she meant. Wow, and five years ago, before any of this local fame stuff hit us, she would barely even speak to me. I got a hard-on from that little episode which, just my luck, didn't pass unnoticed. Jane, a sharp-looking slumming yuppie with dark red hair done in a huge perm, was giggling, grinning at me, holding her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing as I bounded back on the stage.

The set ended with what seemed to me, a slightly anti-climactic version of an old rock-a-billy song called Cast Iron Arm. But they didn't want to let us off. So we did a couple more. Then they demanded a second encore, so we gave them that. Then we were gone, down into the dressing room that was in the basement. Fortunately, we had hired a friend of ours to pack up our stuff for us.

Down in the dressing room was a whole mass of crazy pals, and for better or worse, Roarin' Joe King.

I said, "Hi there Joe! Give 'em hell!"

He looked slightly bugged by my presence in the room. He smiled thinly and said, "That was a real nice set, Hippie Johnny. When are you leaving on your tour and how long are you gonna be gone?"

I said, "Hey, Joe baby. Next week, and I'd just as soon never come back."

He replied, "Hey, Johnny, more power to ya! Now g'wan! Git!"

I laughed. A couple minutes later he left and went upstairs to do his "King" thing.

The dressing room scene was starting to bug me. I didn't want to do any coke. But upon being asked four times in three minutes I relented and did a big line. Since when did I mess with that? It made me feel very hopped up. So then Buzz and I were yelling various congratulatory things at each other, like we were still best pals. Even Neil was cheerful.

He said, "That set was the best yet. I couldn't believe how tight we were playing, especially after all those drinks we had earlier. I thought the drinking was gonna ruin us."

I said, "Sometimes it's like that."

I decided to go up and see how Roarin' Joe King and the Kings of Poland were doing anyhow. They were downright entertaining. Joe King looked bad, like he just came in from fixing a toilet. I didn't know the guys in his band, but they were all quite good. They definitely had the feel of a group that played all the time, continuously rehearsing. And when they weren't rehearsing they hung out at his apartment, jamming night and day. And drinking like fish, just plain all the time. Except for Joe, none of them seemed to speak a word of English. They were all native Poles. But they sure could rock. They all looked plain, like a bunch of workmen. But that made them seem mysterious. They were banging out some very rockin' and funky song called Fourth Of July. I couldn't tell what it was about. The audience was eating their stuff up, just as much as they ate our stuff up. I could see why. I wanted to dance.

There was Elaine standing at the back. When she saw me, she grinned. She was about five foot nine inches tall with medium length dark hair and moderate makeup. She wore a short black skirt and a black low-neck sweater. I went over. I barely knew her. But I knew she liked me. I had a very steady girlfriend at the time. Her name was Estelle. I know trouble when I see it. And I try to avoid it. As a matter of fact, I had always managed to avoid it, but...

Elaine said, "Johnny, baby, that was a such great set you did. I just love you, what you do up there. I don't even know how to express what I feel to you, but your music, it just plain kills me!"

I said, "Oh, come on. Does it really?"

She said, "Hippie Johnny, I really think so."

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