

East of Eden

by Angie

*I have stumbled through the night
Alone as any man can be*

- Lee Holdridge (East of Eden)

Devin let himself into Catherine's apartment. He stood still for a moment after closing the door and regarded the perfectly ordinary layout of a modern suite. No rock, no pipes, no candles – at least none that were lit. A couple of love seats, a stereo and TV in a low wall unit - and through a louvred wooden bi-fold the dinky kitchen common to such living spaces.

It had been a hell of a day, just the latest in a string of them that seemed to coincide all too neatly with one of his rare trips home to the tunnels. Was it always like this? Vincent had assured him it was not, and his memories of those early days were unhelpful. He remembered the occasional crisis, but they usually engaged someone else. Children didn't help with the hard labour. In any case, it was now almost three decades later, and pipes and systems got old. Very old. Too old – and probably over-patched, and if replaced, with shoddier materials too.

He and Vincent had washed up and his brother had headed back home to Catherine. Devin had for once wished he could do the same. Anything to get out of the tunnels. He was heartily sick of them! Then remembered being told of an alternative.

Thank goodness for this apartment, which Catherine kept available to anyone who wanted some 'away time' from the tunnels. She and Vincent had their brownstone, so presumably didn't have a need for this place's additional privacy. He wondered who did use it.

Devin had never availed himself of it before, but needs must, he told himself ruefully. He loved his tunnel family, loved visiting brother and Chandler in their digs, but all that was somehow foreign to him now. He had been places no one, or almost no one else had (Chandler being the exception that proved the rule). Certainly his unique lifestyle and adventures were foreign to everyone. He sometimes felt ... cramped ... in the tunnels, even in its most expansive places.

He sighed again and walked over to the stereo unit and turned on the CD player. There was something in there, and he really didn't care what it was. He

pressed the play button and flopped onto the couch and closed his eyes. Immediately, a liquid voice emanated from the speakers and almost against his will, Devin heard the words, probably the worst words he could have heard, under the the circumstances.

*"I have seen a summer day
That slowly opens like a rose
Along a quiet road that wanders by
And I have smiled and wonder'd
Where it goes*

*I have stumbled through the night
Alone as any man can be
Then found a silent canyon full of stars
And in my heart I heard them telling me
I was home*

*The gentle winds, the rains that fall
The tallest trees, and I'm part of it all
I've seen the silver mountain tops
And golden prairies on my way
Now everywhere I go across the land
I stand so proudly in the sun and say
I am home*

*I've dreamed of Eden all my life
I find it more and more each day
Now everywhere I go across the land
I stand so proudly in the sun and say
I am home" **

Oh ho, Devin thought, as the cut played again, obviously set to repeat. He listened again, and caught the remainder of the words. He felt a tightness in his chest as he listened. It was a beautiful song. He bestirred himself and found the CD cover sitting next to the player. He opened it to the little booklet of information and lyrics and paged through it until he found the song he was listening too.

It was 'An American Hymn' from 'East of Eden' and sung by Placido Domingo. Devin had never been much of a fan of opera, but a song like this one, presumably part of a soundtrack, belted out by a voice of operatic quality, could make him a convert.

The last stanza made his eyes burn.

*"I've dreamed of Eden all my life
I find it more and more each day
Now everywhere I go across the land
I stand so proudly in the sun and say
I am home"*

Now why was that making him all mushy? Devin asked himself - and knew immediately. Vincent. Vincent knew of the sights in this song, but would never see them, at least under the sun. His home was the tunnels, forever, even if he now lived in a brownstone. That house was in New York and the only views he would see would be more brownstones ... and walls. Even the stars were almost impossible to see anywhere in the city, even on a clear night.

Nothing to be done about that, Devin mused, no matter how much they'd wish it for him. Oh, he'd heard a story that Catherine had suggested taking him to her family's summer home, once, but the risks had been considered just too great. Whatever Vincent thought had not been mentioned, nor had he mentioned the incident to his only brother.

So who had been playing this song? Devin wondered. Who would even know of it? That limited the possibilities quite a lot, but more to the point, who would miss the daylight world of beautiful scenery depicted in this song?

His curiosity was extreme, but he was tired, too physically and mentally exhausted to think about it. He twisted to get his feet up on the couch, leaned against the arm and a plump cushion, and closed his eyes, letting the song waft over him and carry him away.

And that was how Vincent found him, on his periodic visit to Catherine's apartment to water the balcony plants and check around. He was a bit surprised to see Devin sleeping soundly on the obviously too-small couch, while a song played in the background. Curious, Vincent quietly opened the door to listen and stood still as it played once, and again. It was on repeat!

The beautiful voice and words brought tears to his eyes - and a modicum of self-pity, which he quickly squashed.

He listened to it through once more, then quietly closed the door and returned to the tunnels, deep in thought.

When Devin awakened, it was fully dark inside and out. He got up with a start and quickly turned off the CD player. What if Vincent had heard it? And that was the answer, he realized. Whoever came here did not feel they should play it in Vincent's presence. How often did they come, whoever they were?

Could it be Chandler? No, she was a city girl. He doubted she would be aching

for the open spaces, although he was sure she appreciated the song as much as anyone. Father? No, he had only rarely left the tunnels.

Devin admitted himself stumped – but also so curious that he vowed to find out who the mysterious listener was.

In the meantime, he needed sleep. He made use of the apartment's bed, and slept peacefully until morning, his dreams filled with some of the wonderful scenery he had seen in his travels.

In the morning, he returned to the tunnels in time to enjoy William's breakfast buffet. He filled a plate and sat down next to Vincent.

“Did you sleep well?” Vincent asked him, looking at him sideways.

“I certainly did,” Devin replied. “No emergencies, no pipe chatter, no trains.”

Vincent chuckled. “You used to not mind such things, Devin. Like the rest of us, to you they were just part of the background.”

“True, but I was very tired last night, and at such times I remember what silence is like.”

“No sirens, traffic noise or late night parties?” Vincent prodded.

“Not that I noticed. Those are normal sounds in a city. Which I may find easier to ignore than you, big brother.”

To this, Vincent said nothing and Devin concentrated on eating. Vincent was ribbing him, of course, but how easy it was to put another interpretation on that last question. Did Vincent suspect? Probably not. But someone knew something, and that someone was probably not Vincent. Finding that person would give him something to do.

How to go about it? Yes ... of course. He would go to Father's library while there was a meeting on, and just hum the tune to himself. He remembered it perfectly. Perhaps he had memorized it while asleep. He had read that people could study that way. No matter. This morning, the tunnel entertainment committee was meeting in Father's chamber. Perfect! He himself didn't sit on the committee, but so much the better. He would have to find a spot where he could observe the reactions.

Devin returned to his chamber, had a bath in the bathing chamber and changed his clothes. He then made his way to the library, well ahead of the scheduled time of the meeting. Tunnel people were always punctual to a fault.

Father greeted him perfunctorily and then returned to whatever had his attention on his table. Paperwork. Even here in the tunnels, there was too much of it, Devin mused.

He browsed around, trying to find a spot where he could observe without being obvious about it. Then he picked out the book he had been looking for, an obvious choice considering, sat himself on a convenient stool and began to

read. Within minutes he heard voices below him and then Father calling the meeting to order.

Quietly positioning himself by the opening, Devin looked down on a group of tunnel folk, whom he identified as Catherine, Vincent, Father, Olivia, William, Mary, Geoffrey, Pascal and Mouse. Well then. If anyone would know the tune, someone down there should.

He waited for bit of a lull in the discussion, then began to hum, just loud enough for them to hear, not so loud as to make it seem like he was deliberately interrupting.

The silence was immediate. Looking down on the group, Devin found himself intrigued at the expressions he caught on several faces, all of them looking up at his hiding place. Except Vincent of course. He looked merely puzzled. Mouse's brow's were knit, as if he was thinking – but Father looked annoyed, a not unusual expression to be directed at himself. However, what the others showed was guilt!

Father cleared his throat. “Devin, are you still up there? Why don't you come down and join us. Your humming is very distracting.”

“Sorry, Father,” Devin called down. He descended the spiral stairs and moved to stand behind Father.

“My apologies,” Devin stated, looking around the table as he mentally prepared himself to drop another verbal bomb. “I was looking for a copy of Steinbeck's *'East of Eden'* and it reminded me of a song I'd heard ... recently.”

If anything, the guilty faces turned to him looked even more so. Devin looked around, trying to decide what he should show on his face, and ended up trying not to show anything.

It was, characteristically, blunt William who spoke up.

“I think the cat's out of the bag,” he commented gruffly, staring at Devin. Then, realizing what he had said, William turned beet red and looked at his hands.

Catherine snorted softly, her shoulders shaking in merriment, then tried to get herself under control. Everyone looked at her, now more embarrassed than guilty.

Vincent merely looked stiff. There was some nervous chuckling from among the group, and a definite *'tsk'* from Mary.

“Mind if I ask what this is all about?” Vincent asked finally. He was obviously not in on the joke – and somewhat peeved as a result.

Mary sighed and spoke into the embarrassed silence.

“Vincent, we share a guilty secret, about ... um ... a sort of music appreciation group. Obviously, Devin has discovered our secret.”

Catherine broke in. “I'm guessing someone didn't remove the CD from the

player in my apartment.”

Pascal went bright red, and everyone chuckled. “Sorry,” he mumbled.

“Ah,” Vincent declared, in his quiet deep voice. “I think I understand. I heard it last night while Devin was in Catherine's apartment. I had gone there to check on it.”

Catherine stared at Devin, her forehead creased in a frown.

Devin put up his hands in surrender.

“How was I to know our knight errant was going to do a recon while I was enjoying a well-earned snooze on the couch?”

There was laughter at this and everyone relaxed a little.

“It was very beautiful,” Vincent commented. “But I fail to see why I was excluded from this little secret.”

Mouse jumped in then. “Didn't want Vincent to be sad. Everyone worried. Said why not listen in Catherine's apartment?”

Ah, thought Devin. Somehow, whenever Mouse stated an opinion about Vincent, it gained considerable relevance. He and Vincent were 'pals', of course. And arguing with Mouse about anything he believed was not recommended. Devin thought he understood.

“And how did it come up for discussion?” Vincent asked, tartly.

Catherine cleared her throat. “My fault. I heard it on the radio, and brought the CD down on my Walkman, with earbuds. I shared it with Mary, and I guess it did the rounds. We didn't want to keep it secret, but Mouse was correct,” she said quietly. “I left the CD in my apartment so anyone could listen at their convenience.”

“But you didn't tell *me*,” Vincent said, looking at her with a pained expression.

“Didn't it make you a little sad?” she asked, ignoring the question.

“It certainly did,” Vincent agreed, “but many things make me feel sad. Should all of them be denied me?”

“For the record,” he paused for the groans at the pun, “I believe we all live '*east of Eden*' – in a very special place indeed. What more could anyone want?”

There was a spontaneous round of applause at that and when Father called for order, the talk automatically returned to the plans for their next musical evening, as if everyone was relieved to get back on topic.

Before leaving, Devin suggested that they consider asking the children to practice playing '*An American Hymn*' – for everyone.

“Point taken. A very good idea,” Father said, a little gruffly, to Devin's retreating back. “Perhaps we can find the sheet music.”

Well, that was almost too easy, Devin thought to himself. He chuckled

remembering Pascal's face. And who would have thought that William would have been a secret admirer of the song? His tunnel family never ceased to amaze him!

A few days later, a pipe burst near the Chamber of the Falls, temporarily blocking access and creating a new waterfall over the lookout. Devin, soaked to the skin and holding up the damaged pipe so that Vincent could weld it, felt the desire for another stay in the apartment coming on.

Perhaps he could find another piece of music to listen to there. Dylan's '*A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*' # came to mind.

"And it's a hard, and it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard/ And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall," Devin muttered to himself, wiping the slurry out of his eyes with one hand, while trying not to lose his grip on the pipe with the other.

Nobody would be sneaking off to listen to THAT song in secret!

END

**Songwriters: Lee Holdridge / Molly-Ann Leikin
'An American Hymn', from 'East of Eden' (TV series 1981)
sung by Placido Domingo
<https://youtu.be/k2eiJKKPs5c>*

*# Bob Dylan: A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall (1963)
<https://youtu.be/T5aI0HmR4to>*