

## Collision Course

**Chuck Gleason**

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*Gleason captures a time when courtship was full of sweet surprises.*

Like Grandma Moses, eighty-four-year-old Chuck Gleason found his talent later in life. Gleason uses his own marriage of six decades to shape his novel, *Collision Course*, the sweet story of Lincoln Comstock and Keli Holloway's collision in college and the course of their relationship.

Life at the small Ohio college Denison University is depicted well; it is easy to imagine students walking to and from class with the Appalachian Mountains in the background. Though the novel revolves around the characters' romance, Gleason also includes rich subplots about Lincoln's pursuit of a varsity letter and Keli's writing and reporting career. Such details realistically depict how students adjust to their newfound independence, the realities of college classes, and how they learn to drop their insecurities and find themselves.

College is a time for students to take exciting classes, meet new people, and learn about themselves. Gleason's protagonists learn a lot about themselves at Denison. Though Lincoln first follows the lead of his boisterous and woman-crazy roommate, Hud, he soon realizes that insulting Keli has the opposite of the effect he desires. Romance is not a straight-and-narrow path. Keli doesn't even like Lincoln at first, thanks to a bad interaction in a creative writing class. The characters collide, veer around one another, and come back together. Though a happy ending seems plausible, the plot is forever twisting.

Some of the dialogue in the book feels dated. For example, when Lincoln and Hud discuss the women and their "outstanding anatomy," they use words like "derrière." An over-the-top character like Hud wouldn't be so restrained with his observations. And there are some clichés in the text, including this one: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." On a more positive note, the book offers some humorous moments, particularly involving Keli. When Lincoln asks Keli if it's true that one of her love interests, Webb, broke things off with her, she sharply responds by saying, "The truth is I dumped him. In fact, I dumped him right into a very cold swimming pool." Keli transforms from a shy young girl into a strong, independent woman focused on her writing career.

Lincoln soon realizes that he needs to "be himself and not some image created by Hud Collins." However, this realization is not demonstrated or explained. Instead, Gleason often tells more than shows the characters' progress, and the novel focuses more on plot than character development. Secondary characters often seem two-dimensional. For example, Webb boldly tells Keli that she should take birth control pills. This seems brash and unrealistic.

Like the warm light of the cabin on the book's cover, there is something comforting about a classic love story. Romantics looking for a wholesome story will be drawn to these characters. Gleason captures a time when courtship was full of sweet surprises.

LISA BOWER (January 10, 2014)

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