

SECOND COMING

CHAPTER 1

Hot...It was unusually hot that day. The sun shone brilliantly through the clouds in triangular rays bathing the city in a warm glow of paternal love. It had rained the night before, and the hot sun created a light fog which rose from the grass. It was only one O'clock, and school didn't end for another hour, but Eric was anxious to get outside before the seasons could change back to winter. He walked the familiar streets of the small city. It was a nice city. Low crime, high land values, even good interest rates. But, Eric just wasn't satisfied. He wanted more. Some adventure on the weekends, not just renting another movie with the human delusions he called friends.

Eric walked along a bridge that ran over an old railway tunnel. It wasn't just any ordinary bridge, oh no. It was the tiniest, ricketiest, piece of shit bridge you ever tried to squeeze two cars across. Every once in a while, some drunk loser was on the front page of the newspaper suing the city for it's poorly constructed bridge. Just because their car had smashed into side. Eric sat on his bum on the rusty guard rail, swung his legs over, and looked at the newly replenished stream below. He found it very exciting the way the fog lay on top of the water giving it the effect of a dark stormy night on the high seas. Eric was sensitive to these kinds of things. He knew he had to be, if he ever wanted to become a real writer like his father was. Sometimes his mother would tell him stories of his dad. She'd always start out with something like, "Your father was the most sensitive, kind man..." or "(sigh) Sometimes I miss Jeffery's wit and sensitivity". It was always something to do with him being sensitive. It was almost like she was telling him that he wasn't sensitive enough. Eric shook the thoughts from his head. He didn't come out here to think about his father, he came to relax a bit before school became too overwhelming. The prospect of attempting his homework gave him the chills. He kicked some pebbles off the edge of the bridge and watched them fall toward the mist only to disappear soundlessly in the cottony matter. Although the stream below him had been replenished, Eric saw that there was still a lot of embankment to walk on. He tightened the straps of his backpack, and quickly glanced around before he lowered himself carefully to the ground below. Once on the ground, the river didn't look so mysterious and fantastic. It was just as dirty and nasty as any of the other rivers in town. Old shoes and cans lay floating along the trench. *It's such a pity that people do this shit*, Eric thought to himself. His attention then was suddenly focused on the tunnel. Not really purposefully, but more like it was attracted or forced there by unnatural causes. The tunnel wasn't really anything special, aside from the fact that it was one of those used by the miners in the gold rush of '49. The town Eric guessed decided to make it a historic landmark, so they kept the tracks, and made it into a bridge after the walls of the tunnel started to cave in. Eric wondered aloud if the tracks were still there, and more importantly if the miners had been careless enough to drop some gold on the way back home. Taking several steps toward the tunnel, Eric soon realized the ground was too soft to walk on. His foot was sucked down by the bog. He was soon up to his shin in cold, slushy mud. Eric pulled his foot out of the murk. It came out willingly with a sickly **SLURP**, and he walk/squished back to dryer land. He unlaced his shoe and pulled off his now brown sock. He bent close to the water and commenced washing his newly

refurbished foot apparel. While his hands started to go numb from the icy water, he tried to occupy his mind by looking up and around. He even started to sing a stupid song he remembered from elementary school. *Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda...* Then humming the rest because he couldn't remember the words. Anything to ward off the icy feeling. *What a stupid song.* And it was a national anthem of somewhere. His teacher had said so. *Waltzing Matilda...* His gaze was again soon transfixed on the tunnel. *Waltzing...* Everything around him started to go quiet. The birds, the wind, soon even the stream wasn't bubbling up at him anymore. It was like the soundtrack to the movie that was his life suddenly was put on mute. A shadow moved in the darkness under the tunnel. Eric began to feel his pulse quicken, and his breaths became short. He wanted to move, run, maybe even scream a bit for the sake of hearing his own voice, but he was transfixed. *Waltzing Matilda, come waltzing with me...* Another movement caught his eye. Only this time it was closer. A faint glint of light like someone trying to reflect the sun in your eyes flashed a couple of times and then was gone. *C'mon Matilda...* He almost pleaded with the imaginary girl in the song. Without taking his eyes off the tunnel, Eric packed his dripping wet sock and shoe into one of the many compartments of his backpack. He then slowly got to his feet and started to back away. Inch by inch he put several feet between the tunnel and himself. *...something something in the Bilibong.* *Waltzing...* Eric wasn't exactly watching where he was going, and on a not so cautious step, he tripped on a rotting log, and uttered a pathetic yelp that was louder than he meant it to be. The cry was almost like a cue for the rest of the world to come back. All the other sounds around him rushed back, swelling his head to the point where he thought his eardrums were going to burst. To steady himself from his stumble, Eric stuck his still shoed foot out against the ground. It went into the earth with the ease of a hot knife slicing Philadelphia cream cheese. He glanced quickly at his foot. Just enough time to pull it out and focus again on the tunnel. There was a shadow bounding at him from the darkness with amazing speed. Whatever it was it was fast, and it was coming for him. **HOLY SHIT!** Eric screamed as he fell backwards into the mud. He cowered there shielding his face from the creature. He shivered in fright. He started saying Hail Mary's and every other pray they ever taught him in catholic school. *I'm going to die, and it's going to be by this stupid tunnel by myself.* The shadow was now only seven feet from him, and Eric readied himself for the blow. A deer bounded out from the darkness, and leaped gracefully over him and the stream in a single bound, then disappeared into the woods. Eric lowered his arms in disgust, closed his eyes, and breathed deeply. The gusts of air that filled his lungs were cold and burned his lungs, but he didn't care. *I was scared of a Fucking deer. Jesus Christ!* Eric picked his sorry, muddy butt up, and sat on a rock. *Eric, get your ass in gear. You can't do anything if you're gonna be scared by a lousy deer. The ratty thing probably had Lyme infested ticks. Great.*

After cleaning the remaining mud off of his footwear, Eric left them in the sun to dry. It was still only 2 O'clock, and Eric did not want to go home and hear his Mother nag him about school while his sister tried to see if cats really didn't like water. The tunnel still intrigued him, and exploring it was definitely on his list of things to do. Shoes or not, Eric decided to make his way to the tunnel. He gingerly tiptoed through the rocks, and debris to the earth where he had lost his footing. He tentatively stuck one toe into the black earth. It was as cold, and wet, and nasty as he remembered, but he pushed on. He scrupulously put the rest of his pink foot into the slime. *EEEWWW. I guess this is how*

bread must feel before it becomes French toast. Eric slid his other foot into the black swirling mire. He started to slowly sink into the ground. *This is pretty cool. It's like floating.* When the filth finally stopped sucking his body into the ground, he was knee deep in the mud. Eric waded toward the tunnel. He had to use all his might to fight his way through the silt, and still keep his balance. About three quarters of the way there, Eric began to think about what might be in the mud. *Oh probably just some leeches...STOP IT NOW This is not the time to think about nasty blood sucking...* Eric stopped mid thought, and sighed. He continued on trying not to think about it.

Finally he waded underneath the tunnel. The sun cast shadows under there, so the mud was even colder. Eric shivered from the chill of the mud, and the spooky feeling of the tunnel. *Ok big shot, now I'm here. What next?* Eric didn't know what next. He hadn't planned that far. *I guess I'll just look around.* He dug into a small pocket in his bag, and produced his mini mag lite. *Never leave home with out it.* He twisted the flashlight, and the magnitude of the beam surprised him. He shone it round the alcove. *Not much.* Eric was right. There really wasn't much. A few more bottles, and some older cans. *Great, went hiking in leech infested mud for nothing.* But, Eric knew it wasn't for nothing, the place just gave off a weird sort of vibration. The beam of his mag lite focused on a small patch of earth on the far side of the tunnel. It wasn't that there was something extraordinary about the dirt, it just seemed a little out of place. Eric waded as fast as one could in knee deep mud over to the dirt. It was positively out of place. Eric put the light aside, and scraped at the ground. It came up easily, but was slow going. He reached into his bag and extracted the spoon his mother packed in his lunch for him to eat his yogurt with. With the spoon, the dirt was cleared in no time. Eric fumbled with the light as his heart raced. His mouth dried up, and his anticipation was killing him. He shone the light on the hole he had just dug, and what he saw so amazed and enticed him, for once he was at a loss for words.

CHAPTER 2

Coty gingerly opened her eyes; the gritty crust that sealed them gave way with little fight. As harsh morning light barged its way between her slitted lids, Coty began to recall where the hell she was and why she was still there.

'Party,' her brain told her through the murkiness of waking. 'Yeah,' she thought back at herself, 'big party, with lots of alcohol.'

She widened her eyes and saw the sienna blades of a dusty gold trimmed ceiling fan spinning above her. The fan hung at a strange angle, its wires exposed, as if someone had begun the process of removal, but became distracted in the middle by the season finale of ER. The fan's cockeyed state made it lurch violently as it spun. Like it wanted to finish the job itself and leap from the ceiling.

A strand of spider web hung from the fan's golden centerpiece and danced about under the spinning blades. Coty thought that the spider with its own version of the mechanized bucking bronco must be very popular. The yellowing stucco ceiling above the blades was horribly discolored by ringed tree stump-like splotches. Coty remembered when she was a small child, similar water stains appeared on the ceiling of her own room after a torrential rainstorm. She briefly shut her eyes again remembering the house from

what seemed like another life entirely. ...she snapped her eyes back open to avoid remembering any more.

Fully awake, Coty pulled her attention from the ceiling and focused on the floor. She pushed herself to a sitting position, and as she brought her head above her body, she had the distinct feeling that what used to be her grey matter did not make the trip with her. Coty thought it was quite possible it had liquefied sometime in the night and her sudden movements were somewhat like popping the plug in a bathtub of water.

Her skull felt as if it were now filled with helium, or another lighter than air gas, with delusions of tornado grandeur. The room shifted unnaturally until she closed her eyes. Then the blackness of her eyelids moved unnaturally. Coty held her face in her hands and let knotted yarny strands of her deep onyx hair fall around her knuckles. She squeezed her temples and concentrated her mind on the gentle slope of her Irish, with Latin influences, nose.

It was a trick she learned years ago from her mother, who learned it from her mother, and so on. Some women hand down jewelry or recipes, Coty's family dealt in hangover and bladder control. If nothing else, it always came in handy after an extraordinarily rough night out, or more often, when she had to pee with no bathroom in sight.

All she had to do was focus on the tiny, almost invisible hairs on the bridge of her nose, and imagine that she could will them to stand on end like a well trained battalion of soldiers. She saw them in her mind, so thin and white they were almost clear. They stood in rows upon rows, like a court of inch worms bent before their inch worm king. She set her mind to the task and as a result squinted a bit; marks of concentration appeared on her brow as a few of the follicles in her mind started to twitch, some standing at attention almost immediately.

Slowly, more and more of the troops were roused and sleepily came to. Some leapt to their full height, standing stiffly, while others would make a go at it, but then fall back down, bouncing back and forth like tiny cat toys or fishing poles with a heavy catch trying to jump off the hook.

When they all finally stood at the ready, Coty gently opened her eyes and let the room come back into focus. Amazingly, as always, her headache had already begun to subside. 'Mind over bladder,' she thought as she usually did after using her trick.

'Time to go,' she reminded herself, and lowered her hands to the couch cushion. She pushed to a standing position and had to immediately sit back down again from surprise when she saw the body.

Something told Coty this was somehow her fault. The guy, who couldn't have been more than 26, was definitely unconscious, but probably not dead. Coty thought 26 at the very most, and possibly much younger from his baby faced features. A bit of dried blood stood on his upper lip, no longer oozing from an obviously broken nose which sat askew on his otherwise unharmed boyish face. Dark stains with some sort of dried texture tie-died the guy's pants.

Coty bent to check his pulse and noted that as her face approached his, she could see slight splatterings of deep purple under his eyes which would undoubtedly spread into enormous rings over the next few hours. She pressed two fingers to the side of his newly stubbled neck. Her movement stirred the air between them and she caught a whiff of his musky cologne mixed with the pungency of vomit. The scent triggered a series of

flashbacks beginning with the two of them holding several short dialogues throughout the evening.

She hadn't liked him from the start. He was too confident, stood too close, and spoke too quickly. She chuckled a bit to herself remembering how he slided over to her and leaned a hand to the wall, past her ear attempting a "hey-baby lean." Coty had thought that move died out in the early '90s. Against her nature, she politely declined his advances, and excused herself. Coty was there to have a good time and didn't want some dipshit putting her in a bad mood.

But like many men she had the displeasure of meeting, he was horribly determined and persistent throughout the evening. Her unusual patience ended just before the midori sour and three long Island iced teas forced her to the couch for the remainder of the evening. He must have thought it an opportune moment since just the two of them were left in the basement - everyone else having left or gone to bed. Coty had been given a flat, limp pillow to accompany her for the night and she was attempting to fluff it, if at all possible, when her acquaintance sidled over to her for the last time. He must have had at least as much to drink as she, for it seemingly took all his concentration to tap her on the arm and continue standing upright. She faced him, a long moment passed, both of them swaying in conjunction like some new dance craze. Then he spoke and it was the beginning of the end.

Coty recalled how he explained that he wasn't normally as forward as he had been with her. It took a lot of work to smirk as little as she did after hearing that familiar line, but Coty managed to contain herself. He went on to apologize and at the end of his well practiced speech he had asked for a hug to show that there were no hard feelings. Coty thought a handshake would have done just as well, but acquiesced if it would let her go to bed sooner. The embrace went on uncomfortably long, and Coty began to struggle to loosen his hold. Instead, he tightened it, lowered a hand to the small of her back and pressed his pelvis to hers. She felt his erection drill into her navel like some sort of misguided woodpecker.

Coty's temper lurched up her spine and coupled with the queasiness already put in place by her choices of refreshment, her anger literally vomited from her mouth onto the unsuspecting boy like Godzilla raining an attack onto defenseless Tokyo. The projection was watery, but muddled with her usual dinner of chicken fingers and to her delight, not only splashed onto his trousers, but clung there in clusters. It was messy, but got the job done; she was released.

The boy apparently wasn't used to rejection and so his immediate reaction to her unexpected and highly unusual reciprocation was merely surprise. Soon enough though, his widened eyes narrowed to angry slits.

He grabbed her thin upper arms and pulled her in close again, sucking wind in preparation to give her more than just a piece of his mind. Instead, to his surprise again, Coty brought her hands together in a prayer position then thrust them upward, breaking his hold. She then took a quick step backward for balance and as he started toward her to regain his hold, she brought the heel of her slim fingered hand into the boy's ski-jump nose with it's rounded button on the end.

As she drove her arm forward, Coty couldn't help but feel both a twinge of envy and satisfaction. His nose was seemingly his only saving grace; that and his clear blue

eyes. Coty had always wished for a nose like that, and for several Christmases begged the mall Santa for a new eye color. Anything but boring brown.

Coty's palm connected somewhat cockeyed with her opposition which relieved her a bit because even though the kid touched her in a somewhat inappropriate manner, he didn't deserve to die from a brain piercing by his own nose.

The sound the boy's face uttered was almost like the music Coty's younger sister made when chomping on ice cubes. Coty and her aggressor both stumbled backward. He fell hard onto his rear holding his face with both hands, blood starting to ooze between his fingers. She wind-milled her arms for balance and landed on the couch.

The last thing she remembered before passing out was seeing him fall on his side and she thought, 'good. He won't choke on his own blood.'

The end of her memory brought Coty back to the present. The odor of her vomit sprung her to a standing position again. The boy stirred a bit in his sleep and smacked his lips as if dreaming of eating a really tasty coffeecake. "Time to go. Now." Coty reminded herself aloud.

She raised a boot clad foot and began to step over her conquered kill. She paused for a moment picturing herself in a ridiculous pith helmet, foot propped on the kid's hip for a photo op. She chuckled a bit then continued her motion, stepping meanly on the tips of his right hand's outstretched fingers. They curled with primal response, but could not escape. Coty brought her other leg over and in front of her, but before taking her first step towards the outside world, gave the kid's fingers an extra twist of her heel like she did when extinguishing a cigarette butt.

A few strides later she was letting herself quietly out the sliding glass door into dew heavy grass which was more than a few weeks overdue for a trim. The late morning sun warmed her neck and soaked her dark hair as she made her way to her ride. To most it was a rusty Trans-Am, which used to be silver, but after years of wear seemed to be maroon. To Coty it was freedom, and so she named it that. Freedom squawked as she opened the driver's side door. She made a mental note to pick up some WD-40, and closed the door. She started Freedom's engine at the same time, drowning out both the slam of the door and its aching groan. Coty smiled; she could always depend on Freedom to start the first time and roar to life impressively. She kept a tally near the steering column of people who've visibly jumped in surprise to Freedom's engine.

Coty jammed the clutch and threw the shifter into first. She gave the gas equal ferocity and Freedom went from peaceful grumbling to a rising howl as the tachometer climbed towards red like a second hand on crack. When it pointed at almost 5000 RPM Coty released the clutch and Freedom lurched forward, nearly clipping a mailbox and leaving plenty of rubber and exhaust on the street behind them.

CHAPTER 3

The room was silent except for the familiar hum of a lone computer, and the infectious white noise of static that seems to make your brain itch. Accompanying the white noise was video snow projected on a pull down screen hanging from the wall. Men and women in businesses attire sat around a long mahogany table. A solid thump came from underneath, followed almost immediately by a clearly audible expletive. Some of the people snickered but most merely rolled their eyes.

Dennis sat quietly and demurely away from the table near a window with its automatic shade drawn to the floor. His hands were folded atop of his knees which pressed together hard enough to make his thighs burn. He felt awkward enough attending the meeting, and the delay was beginning to make him squirm. He hoped no one would try to make small talk. Keeping his eyes forward, Dennis reached into his inside pocket and brought out his handkerchief. As he mopped at his neck, he caught a glimpse of the blue embroidery around its edge. 'Damn,' he cursed inaudibly. With all the trouble he went to wear plain clothing, and he still brought the damn handkerchief. He was just to be a casual and inconspicuous observer. Dennis stuffed it away quickly, the words embroidered on the hankie burning in his mind like on the rump of a freshly branded steer. 25 years of service. 25 years...Dennis thought about all those years and wondered how many of them he served in accordance with his oath. 20? 15? That many even? Was there a breaking point? Sure, that was when they gave him the cursed snot rag only a few months ago. Why else would he be attending a meeting for such a ludicrous concept? But by that time it was way too late; autopilot had been switched on long ago.

He was ordained in '75 and remembered his overwhelming excitement even if the feeling was now dim and transparent like a phantom. The excitement of becoming a priest overtook him by both mind and body, and he had had to excuse himself only minutes into the ceremony. Bolting to a run from his lying position on the ground was no easy task and was talked about at almost all ordainments afterwards. The congregation waited patiently for him to return and finish the ceremony while he conducted his own ceremony praying to the porcelain god in the bathroom. ...