

## CHAPTER ONE

Daniel Caine gazed out the window of the limousine, ignoring the rubbernecking driver. The furtive glances were annoying. *But you like it*, he had to admit to himself. Fame was a bitch, every bit as addictive as any of the drugs he ever tried, maybe more so.

Three months at the Betty Ford Clinic exorcised most of the demons. “Hi, my name is Dan, and I’m rich and famous and so goddamn happy about it that I’ve turned my body into a walking pharmacy.”

“Hi, Dan!”

The Muse, she had been the last to leave. The last to be drowned in the slowly rising tide of drugs that fixed his mind, but killed his spirit. Like McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, he was now a shell of a man. The Words no longer poured out in a torrent of Passion fueled by The Muse.

Blind Billy hopped on his Indian bike, swung Little Nell up behind him and drove into the sunset, the heat on his face his compass.

Adios, asshole.

The pendulum sped up on him. The distance between Heaven and Hell growing smaller, until soon it was not weeks nor days that separated the Happy Daze from The Dark...only hours. No amount of coke, heroin, meth, alcohol or any combination thereof could stop the spiral.

And all of Caine’s dope and all of Caine’s booze, couldn’t put Caine back together again.

None of the Last Days were very coherent, just blurs of sound and pictures. He could recall resting his head on the massive oak slab of his desk beside his handy-dandy Royal (the “p” still not oiled and stuck halfway to the paper). He had stared, unblinking, as the sun sank behind the mountains.

The old black man whispered in his ear, “Welcome to my world, brother”. His body was paralyzed, his retinas burned out, but his ears still registered the party raging on the other side of his office door.

He could hear his heart pounding through the wood. Very fast, so fast in fact that it was no longer able to keep up the pace. It started to miss a few beats here and there. The rhythm became almost musical. He would have grinned if his face wasn’t melting. His life was riding off to the tune of the William Tell Overture, the fucking theme to the Lone Goddamned Ranger.

Da-dum. Da-dum. Da-dum-diddy-dum. Hi-ho, Cocaine, away...da-dum, da-da. Da. Dumb.

He heard a distant scream. Sam? And felt as if he was floating.

Inside of an ambulance, some asshole was wailing on his chest with a pair of chrome frying pans. He had covered the guy with puke. *That'll teach the sumbitch.*

That was months ago. All that mattered now was The Muse was gone. All he had left were the Words she'd pulled from him before he had drowned her...

"Fuck now or forever hold your piece". Wicked Wanda had lots of witticisms, but that was by far her favorite. The one she loved to use on the tricks who couldn't seem to get it up. Usually the Midwestern types who were more overcome by guilt, than by lust, by the time they had reached the hotel room. The man woke up gagged and bound to the sound of someone singing "Going to the Chapel and we're gonna get maaarried, going to the Chapel of Love".

*Chapel of Love* sold four million copies, allowing him to move his family out of the shithole apartment they called home for three years and far away from the sadistic landlord that would inspire his next novel. Along the way, it nearly brought the prostitution industry in Vegas to its collective knees.

The Muse had arrived, and she was long overdue.

When he was thirteen, he spent the Memorial Day weekend alone on his Uncle's farm in the backwoods of Nebraska. Within an hour of his family's departure he'd tripped and fallen through the rotted storm cellar door and been temporarily paralyzed from the waist down.

Instead of losing his virginity to Nikki Weilandner as planned, he spent 86 hours in complete darkness with only the spiders and rats for company. Lucky thirteen. That was when the horror bug initially bit him.

As often as not, the spark came from the news. A priest that was busted in Dallas for pissing in the baptism pool became John the Baptist.

His Father John, a traveling preacher, laced his mobile baptismal pool not with piss, but with his own homemade concoction of LSD, hallucinogenics, and God only knows what else. On his path through the Bible Belt, Father John left behind thousands of deep-fried, and sometimes mutated, converts.

The movie rights alone brought him more money than he and Sam could have earned in a lifetime of teaching. What a movie it was, too. Corman's best, some said. Caine knew one thing

as he sat in Mann's Chinese Theatre shoveling greasy popcorn down his throat as guts and gore spilled across the silver screen. He had arrived.

Now all of his books were optioned. Even before he had written them. Even before he had conceived them, the studio execs were knocking on his door. It made him feel like some sort of sperm-bank gigolo. Hollywood whores wrapped around the block as he jacked off onto the pages.

Armani suited agents crowded around as he pushed and pushed, delivering right on the auction block. Marty coached him on his breathing, as the auctioneer bellowed out “Hey, homina, hey! Do I hear threeeee? I hear three, hey. Do I hear four? Four million? Four million to the man in the Armani suit. SOLD!”

As the latest and greatest flopped out, Marty quickly cut the umbilical cord and raised the book high above his head. Welcome to the circle of life, little fella. Marty couldn't have been prouder, unless it had been twins.

Every time Caine thought he'd run out of juice, thought there could not possibly be another book in him, the Muse would whisper (or scream) in his ear and prove him wrong.

*Rabbit's Foot...Area 51...The Indian...*

The public was his inspiration for *The Indian*, the story about a '38 Indian motorcycle with an insatiable thirst for blood. With five gallons of B positive sloshing around its chrome tank, the bike took its owner on a cross country trip of death and destruction. He used the money from the advance on that one to buy an original '38 Indian and wrote the book on the road, using the sleazy border towns and empty deserts as inspiration.

Now, they all demanded to know when The Muse was coming back. Caine had no answer.