

prologue

It's a beautiful, warm May morning with barely a cloud in the sky. The year is 1987. An '84 Red Corvette T-Top convertible can be seen driving over the Walt Whitman Bridge from Philadelphia to New Jersey. As the shimmering car pulls into the toll booth, Pete, a tanned, athletic guy in his late twenties with dark, brushed backed hair, wearing Ray-Ban Aviator sunglasses, reaches into his pocket to pay the toll. Smiling, the toll taker says, "Thanks, Pete, I heard what went down, but I think you're gonna' be fine. You're too good of a person for anything bad to happen to you." Pete replies in a shaky voice, "Yea, I hope God takes care of the dummy this time", as a tear rolls down his cheek. "Where are you going, the casino? Trying to take your mind offa' things?", the toll taker asks Pete. "Nah, Just goin' to a place I haven't seen for a long, long time." Cars start beeping behind the Corvette and Pete waves and pulls out as the toll taker yells out, "Take care, buddy, I'll be praying for you."

Pete takes off over the bridge. The smell of the river water and mud below blows into the car window and the odor is overpowering yet comforting to Pete as he points the Corvette in the direction of the Atlantic City Expressway while he reaches under his seat to feel the cold steel of a '38 caliber pistol, saying to himself, "This isn't supposed to end this way."

chapter one

It's July, 1970 on a hot, muggy Sunday morning in Gray's Ferry, an Irish section of South Philadelphia. Church bells are ringing and music is playing on car radios as the drivers slowly navigate down narrow one-way streets. A slim, dark-haired Italian woman of about 35 is working in the kitchen of a row house, preparing breakfast of mozzarella and eggs. She walks to the bottom of the narrow stairs and calls up to her son. "Peter, wake up! Don't you have to deliver your papers? Hurry up." "Shit, it's 10 o'clock, I was supposed to have the papers on the doorstep by 6." Peter, a thirteen-year old, heavy-set boy with a "brush" haircut, jumps up from his bed, throws on his baggy plaid Bermuda shorts, white t-shirt, his black framed glasses, and runs down the stairs. "Do you want something to eat before you go?" Maria, his mother, asks Peter. "I made your favorite, mozzarella and eggs. Eat before you go." "Nah, that's alright. I'll rob some milk from somebody's doorstep." Maria yells at Peter, "What!" "See ya later, Ma.", as he runs out the aluminum screen door and lets it slam behind him. Peter grabs a rusty shopping cart and throws it down the porch steps right into his next door neighbor's 1963 green Chevy Impala. Walking up the street observing this is Mrs. McMullin, another neighbor. "Hey, Peter! You do that again, and I'll have to tell your mother." Peter disappears down the street to collect his papers and yells back to her, "Sorry." But under his breath he whispers, "Big deal".

Peter rushes down the street with the shopping cart and runs into his buddies, Kevin, a thin, red-haired, freckled boy of about 12 years old, and Dave, also 12, a thin, Irish boy with blond hair and blue eyes, sitting on the corner in front of the shoe repair shop, laughing at Peter. "Peter, why ya always late on Sunday mornings?", Kevin asks. "Cause my mom lets me stay up to