

Big Dog —Bruce Deitrick Price — Amazon

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Chapter 1

THE NAKED LADY

I'll start with the naked lady.

It was a hot day, the sun etching black shadows on the concrete boardwalk. Heat clung to my bare forearms and leeches out sweat. I was sporting a blue jersey with a kangaroo on the chest, gray slacks, a pair of those rubber shower slippers the Japs invented, and my Ray Ban shades that made me think nobody could see me. I was thirty-six years old and felt more. I was feeling pretty good anyway. I enjoyed heat.

I leaned on the fat aluminum railing that keeps tourists from falling off the boardwalk. I stared out at the ocean. It was a hard blue color. I saw a few ships sailing off to the usual exotic ports. Meanwhile, in the Rec Room, the sailors were playing checkers. I had tried that life.

My eyes drifted in toward shore. A lot of pale bodies were jumping around in the waves. The surf was rough and uneven. Little cliffs of white foam piled up close to shore. Some bodies were diving under the waves. Other bodies stood sideways and let the waves smack them one.

The beach itself was a bright, white ribbon forty yards wide, that stretched as far as you could see in both directions. A lot of bodies were on that beach, most of them with no bigger worry than keeping sand off the transistor radio. Now and then you could hear

one of the bodies shout something. Mostly their cries were lost in the bottomless, unheard roar of the sea.

This was Labor Day Monday, the last big orgasm before most of the tourists pulled out and Virginia Beach settled into a more sensible September. Virginia Beach is a sandy, sprawling place where Virginia touches the Atlantic Ocean. Captain John Smith landed here in 1603. The sailors raised a cross and then beat it up the James River to a more secure piece of real estate. Forty years ago Virginia Beach was nothing but summer cottages and a big hotel for wealthy folk. Now it's a year-round, grown up community with more motels than distinguished citizens.

I came in on a plane seven years before. I worked out of an office on Atlantic Avenue, sixty yards off the beach. The office was on the second floor above a postcard and sea shell emporium. I had two phone numbers and a reliable answering service. I could walk around in the heat anytime I pleased. I was my own boss and when I told myself to do something, I didn't have to do it. On this Monday afternoon I thought I might like a stroll on the boardwalk. That's how I happened to see the naked lady.

The scene before me was hot and sleepy, people lying motionless or moving slowly among the helter-skelter of towels. Then there was a figure pacing fast and erratically. A young woman perhaps thirty, with long dark hair. She was very slender and seemed to be pretty. She was barefoot but not dressed for the beach. She wore a simple black skirt and a white blouse. She seemed to be looking for something in the sand.

People glanced at her; then they stared. She was in the middle of the white beach, halfway between me and the water. When she turned my way, I saw that she was

babbling to herself. Then she screamed. Not words. Just a loud wail that came faintly my way.

Her hands fidgeted at her chest and in a few seconds she had unbuttoned her blouse and tossed it to the sand.

She moved faster now, as though knowing somebody would try to stop her. The dark skirt fell from her hips and she ran out of it. She darted left and right. Without unhooking her white bra, she pulled it up over her head, and like a stripper in a speeded-up film she flipped the bra in the face of a young lad on a beach towel. He looked surprised. The lady's breasts bounced as she ran. Black shadows changed shape beneath those breasts. Long black shadows came and went on her legs. She pushed the black panties down and they fell and became just another black shadow in the sand.

People on the boardwalk pressed against the railing to see the naked lady. The *oohing* and *aahing* hurt my ears.

We could see that the lady was crying. Bodies were forming a large circle around her. She didn't want to be confined. She ran flailing at the nearest part of the circle and the bodies backpedaled. People were afraid of the lady. Her nakedness gave her power, a sort of magic. The bodies jumped aside as if she could burn them.

A muscular life guard was trying to catch the lady. He carried a blanket before him like a toreador holds a cape. He finally got a shot from behind and threw the blanket over the lady's left shoulder. Once the lady wasn't so naked, a lot of gentlemen materialized to help the lad. Pretty quick the lady was wrapped like a mummy. She was hoisted a few

inches off the sand and carried toward stairs that led up to the boardwalk. She was lost in an orgy of bodies.

I heard a siren in the distance. One of the ominous sounds and I loved it.

I found out a week later that the naked lady was the only daughter of Jim K. Dillon. A big city reporter might call Dillon a two-bit political boss. His underlings and admirers at the Beach called him the Big Boss. A cop told me a rumor that his poker pals called him Big Dog. Dillon was 5-feet-8 or close. I guess the nicknames made him feel good.

Dillon was said to be in real estate. He had never been elected to anything, tourists never heard his name, his picture was not in the papers. But he was as much a part of life at Virginia Beach as the endless murmur of waves breaking along the beach. And me--I underestimated him until the end. I was used to tough guys and bad boys, the kind with dumb eyes who don't mind stopping by your house to break your leg. None of which was Dillon's style. He was more the noiseless, patient spider.

But that Labor Day Monday the Big Boss was just a name to me. And his daughter was just a naked lady. I could see she was attractive. I knew she was unhappy. I assumed there had to be a sad story. But I already knew plenty of those. Every client brought me another one. So I turned and shouldered through the crowd toward Atlantic Avenue. Back to the office. I had work to take care of. The naked lady wasn't any of my business. Not yet.

END CHAPTER 1

