

BRUCE JONES

"Credit the author with a vivid imagination
and [a] taste for the macabre."

THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW



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To do what he does,
he must be mad.
To try and trap him,
a cop must be crazy....

IN DEEP



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藏书章
Bruce Jones

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More Praise for IN DEEP

“A diverting read . . . Bruce Jones draws an interesting sleuth.”

The Cleveland Plain Dealer

“Intriguing . . . [with a] particularly nice twist at the end.”

Publishers Weekly

To my mother and father

PROLOGUE

THE TWO BOYS CAME DOWN TO THE SEA BRINGING NOISE and fumes to Sunday morning fog.

It was cold, even for Southern California, even for June, and the boys, not yet twenty, bearing little fat along their tanned, muscular torsos, felt the chilly air and far chillier water. If they resented this, they apparently resented more a life without surfing. It was what they did.

They arrived in a rusty Volvo owned by Todd, who parked it along an empty, early Sunday morning curb, unlatched the tailgate, and withdrew his shiny, freshly waxed board from atop Gerome's. They each pulled on the upper halves of black neoprene wet suits. Bottom halves were for sissies. They zipped up, hoisted their boards, faced a fog-shrouded shore, sun-bleached hair iridescent under undulant clouds of moisture. They didn't attempt conversation over the booming surf; they'd done this before.

Todd locked the car, hid the keys in the sand beneath a gray stone, and lurched with Gerome toward the bracing freedom of swells the weatherman had promised would be high today.

Gerome pulled ahead, straight into the gray horizon and slapping foam; Todd hesitated at the shoreline to dislodge a metallic sliver. The beach was becoming ever more debris-strewn, an occupational hazard. The sliver had not provoked bleeding, to Todd's eminent relief, his fear of sharks already being disproportionate to the facts. The movement allowed him to pause long enough to spot the woman.

She lay supine against a red-and-white towel some sixty

yards or so down the beach, just beneath the ivory rise and greenish crest of the palisades. She seemed to be quite naked. Todd lingered long enough to satisfy his adolescent curiosity about her breasts, which, from where he stood, appeared commendable, then dashed unperturbed into the surf after his companion. There was nothing unusual about nude bathing on this stretch of Santa Barbara coast; the boys had seen it often, grown happily inured. They had come to surf.

They did so for half an hour, moving apace with the biggest swells, which coincidentally broke larger down the beach near the sunbathing woman—if there had been, indeed, sun to bathe in.

Todd was finally thinking about this when he paused in thigh-deep foam to stare again. The woman lay silently on her bright red-and-white towel, face to the filtered sky, arms at her sides, legs slightly parted. He could just detect the dark tuft of pubic hair, the generous loll of pink-tinged bosom beyond. She wore sunglasses.

“You’re getting a hard-on, asshole.” Gerome grinned somewhere behind him.

It was partially true; he’d had to urinate for some time now; that and the woman’s ubiquitous presence had stirred him.

Gerome always peed in the water, but Todd didn’t like that. His chosen spot—out of sight from prying eyes—was a small cleft of rock not far from the woman. There, back to the sea, face to stone, he could get the urethra muscles to relax. He’d have to walk past her to get to it, though.

Shivering, Todd laid his board on the sand.

“Ask her if she likes it two at a time!” Gerome snickered, and flopped on his board, knifing a comber as his comrade advanced on the cliff.

Gerome paddled out and over the next lazy swell, feeling the chill across his rubber-encased back, aware of his aloneness, of tales he’d heard of vanished swimmers, of what might be down there; thoughts always close, dancing at the periph-

ery, tax-paid, like the rock scrapes and the cold, for the privilege of the sport.

He stroked farther, turned and straddled the board for the next wave, saw Todd signaling from beside the woman. A good swell was building and he caught the crest to carry him to shore, trying to believe his abruptly thudding heart was the result of exertion alone.

Laying his board beside Todd's, trudging toward the palisades, instinct told him otherwise. Todd was staring at him, not at the woman, his body rigid, spasming at intervals. Face gray.

A few more yards through truculent sand, and Gerome could see why the red-and-white towel was mostly red. . . .

TULLY

THEY HAD THE YELLOW POLICE TAPE UP BY THE TIME Detective Sergeant Eustes Tully reached that section of Laredo Beach.

Mostly the tape provided a comforting declaration of professionalism; there weren't many people on the beach besides the two boys, it was still too chilly. The tape helped devulgarize the contrast between death and scenic ocean-scape—this kind of thing didn't happen in Santa Barbara.

Detective Sergeant Brumeister was waiting with his snide smile, just this side of the tape. Detective Tully had never cared for Brumeister; Brumeister was the only man on the force who called him Eustes.

"Morning, Eustes, come to view our floater?"

Detective Tully had not yet had his coffee. "No, William, I thought I'd come down here on my day off and see if I could catch a few waves, hang ten. Who told you she was a floater? Billings said she's dry."

"Dry's the word, Eustes, could have used a few quarts of the old petro gel."

You would say that, asshole, thought Tully.

"See the fight last night?"

"No, William."

"The nigger won. You have any money down?"

"No, William."

"Should have come to me." Then, when Tully shouldered past indignantly: "Always nice to see you, Eustes."

Asshole.

Tully straddled the tape, nodded at the forensic crew. "Top of the morning, Ted, what have we got?"

Ted Sears was sealing the sunglasses into a plastic evidence bag. He looked wan and bloated in the morning light, like everyone else. "Two smudged whorls on the left lens, probably hers. No skin under the nails. Nothing on the toenails. She didn't die here. Towel, standard white beach towel, one of a million. Oh, yeah, a black one-piece swimsuit was lying beside her, but it was dry. That's all. Fred wants a word. How's the arthritis?"

"Intermittent."

"Did you try the Icy Hot?"

"I will, thanks."

Fred Wanamaker, county coroner, moved his back out of the way and Tully could see the corpus delicti. She shone, even against the sand. But it was hard to ignore the mess between her legs.

"Did she float, Fred?"

Wanamaker turned, smiled faintly in Tully's presence, took off his wire-rimmed glasses with a circular motion. In the harsh light, Tully thought he looked old. Certainly jaded. "Hi, Tully. No, didn't Billings tell you?"

"Brumeister got it mixed up."

"Asshole. No, she's ours. Ten to twelve hours ours. You can kiss the Coast Guard good-bye."

"Shit."

"Always on Sunday, eh? I'll need her in the lab, but the vaginal assault alone would have done it."

"Yeah?"

"Both labia shredded, vaginal walls destroyed. We'll find a punctured uterus, mark my word. No other marks."

"Semen?"

"Not externally. Need the autopsy, find the hubby quick."

"Who says she has one?"

Wanamaker, who had a reputation for psychic prognosis, turned and viewed the body. "Just a feeling."

They watched her a moment.

“Pretty, huh, Tully?” Then, almost unprofessionally wistful: “But she won’t tan today.”

Both men were silent for a time.

“How old do you think, Fred?”

“Thirty-two, -three. Dancer. Or athlete, look at the legs.”

Tully was gazing at the surrounding sand. It wasn’t bloody and it wasn’t mused except for two approaching rows of barefoot impressions.

“Those belong to the boys,” Wanamaker confirmed.

Tully glanced at the black-and-white down the beach, the two blond heads huddled within. Brumeister was doubtlessly grilling them. But they didn’t do it, and the killer’s tracks had been swept clean by anything from the tide to the wind to a small whisk broom. Too bad it didn’t take some of this garbage with it.

Ted Sears walked up. “I had a great day at the zoo planned for the kids. They love that train.”

“Ted, the Parks and Beach Department comes through here every morning and picks up, smooths over the sand with a grader; make sure you’ve got all your pictures before they come.”

“Right.”

Tully stooped to the sand on impulse, poked aside a rubbery helix of kelp with his index finger, uncovering a smooth glass sphere the size of a half dollar. “What’s this look like to you guys?”

“Flashbulb,” Wanamaker said.

Tully blew sand off it. “I thought cameras had these things built in nowadays.” He squinted over his shoulder at Sears.

Sears shrugged.

Tully turned and extended a hand. “Gimme a bag, Ted.”

Sears found one and Tully dropped the object inside with his handkerchief, sealed it. He straightened and held the bulb to the murky sun.

“It’s been fired,” Sears commented.

“My old lady used to have one of those cameras,” Wanamaker mused.

Tully handed the bag to Sears. "Dust it. But I want it back even if it's clean."

"You got it."

He turned then and looked out at the ocean horizon, dark blue meeting lighter blue now that the fog was burning off.

"Going to be a nice day after all," Sears said.

Tully felt the dead woman behind him, pressing invisibly at his back. Not for everyone, he thought.

"All right," he commanded the air about him, "let's finish up and get her out of the sun."

He walked down the beach to tell Brumeister to let the two boys go.

Detective Tully sat in the McDonald's regarding the pay phone on the opposite wall with baleful eyes.

It was time for another of those calls.

There was still a good bite-and-a-half of Big Mac left. And two or three fries at the bottom of the greasy paper sack. And a good three sips of Coke if there was a drop. No point in calling until he'd finished eating. A man had to eat, after all.

He looked at his watch for no particular reason. He sighed. He stared at the legs on the teenager sitting with her boyfriend across from him. Her boyfriend had orange spiked hair. What would a good-looking pair of gams like that want with a geek like him? Kids.

Now the Big Mac was gone and so were the fries and only one sip of Coke was left.

This is bullshit, get it over with.

He resolutely stashed his paper leftovers in a louvered trash container and picked up the receiver, shoving in dimes.

He dialed a familiar number.

"Hello."

"Hi, it's me."

"What's the matter, Eustes?"

He pinched back a sigh, steeling himself. "Why do you automatically assume something's wrong?"

"Why else would you call?"

"Because I like to talk to you, maybe?"

“You’re canceling.”

Shit. She always knew. Always. “Something came up, Mae.”

Silence.

“Are you there?”

“Something always does.”

He felt his stomach tighten despite himself. “It’s serious, or I wouldn’t break our lunch date.”

“I’m sure.” Patronizing.

A woman’s been murdered, he thought, but didn’t say it. Instead he said: “It’s my job, I’m a cop. You know that.”

“What about dinner—”

“I’d like to. I’ll phone you.”

“—that is, unless it’s an inconvenience.”

“It’s not.”

“If you’re too busy—”

“It’s not a goddamn inconvenience!”

“I don’t see the need for profanity.”

“Look—”

“You know I don’t care for it.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll phone you, okay?”

“Can I count on that?”

“Yes.”

“Eustes—?”

Grinding his teeth, knowing what was coming.

“Eustes—promise me?”

“All right, yes. I promise.”

“I don’t think it’s too much to ask. Is it too much to ask?”

“No.”

“If it is, just—”

“It isn’t too much to ask.”

“I love you, darling.”

“I love you, too, Mae. I have to go now.”

“Until tonight, then.”

He hung up without saying good-bye, his only way of getting the last word.

MOTHER

MOTHER CAME TOPSIDE TO THE FOREDECK TO AVOID THE smell of chemicals. Mother disliked the chemical odors, especially the hypo fixer.

She stood in the cool Pacific breeze, flord muumuu gathered about her, gazing out across the dark waters to the silhouetted lump of the Channel Islands and the winking lights of the oil platforms. Behind her, Santa Barbara's "Riviera" hills winked with diamond lights, sequestering executives and movie stars and a million hopes and dreams. Mother's own dark dreams lay unfulfilled still, but she was getting close, she was getting close, and there was time.

She gazed into the dark waters below the yacht's scuppers and thought about money and thought about Sonny and thought about women and thought about death. To port, a flying fish broke the surface with iridescent terror, pursued by another kind of death, flashed across the moonless surface, and rejoined its own world. Mother contemplated all the fish in the sea and all the work ahead and allowed herself a long, deserved sigh. It was a nice night, though, especially with the crew gone ashore. A night to be alone with Sonny.

She descended to him.

He already had the screen and projector set up, the newly mounted slides lined up in the carousel tray, ready to begin tonight's show.

Mother eased into the tan leather couch before the screen, looking up with a proud smile as Sonny came through the cabin door with the silvery tray, fresh from the galley: sardines in mustard sauce with soda crackers, and General

Foods International Coffees' Café Mocha. Her favorite evening snack.

"Thank you, Sonny." She reached for the coffee and took a delicious, chocolatey sip: no caffeine, no sugar—Nutrasweet. Mother did not use products with saccharin. Saccharin had been found to cause cancer in laboratory rats; it said so on the label. She couldn't imagine how the American government—a government she'd always respected—allowed the sale of such products. Or why they still allowed the sale of things like cigarettes. Didn't they care about people's health? It was shameful.

There were many things wrong with the world, she supposed, the result of wicked men doing wicked things. Far too many to count, really, to ever realistically do anything about, though God knows one must try. Wicked men. Grown from wicked little boys. And this the sad result of one great, heart-wrenching truth—the real root of all evil—bad mothers.

How many bad mothers were there? How many had there been throughout history, throughout the world?

The statistics were dizzying, and it was probably best not to think of such things. Thinking of such things led to confusion, and it was vitally important to remain unconfused at all times. You must—above all else—know who you are.

Still . . . one could hardly not think of them, could one?

The best thing, perhaps, was simply to try to be a good mother oneself, to set a precedent through example. To do what one could in one's own little way. To protect one's offspring from all the worldly evils one could.

That's what she had always tried to do with Sonny.

Even though, of course, she'd failed.

Even though it was, in all probability, too late for Sonny.

Still, she must not stop trying.

She sighed heavily again and closed her eyes for a weary moment as Sonny started the projector. It was very tiring being a good mother.

The first slide showed the bright, sunny beach.

Sonny always started things this way, just some simple,

idyllic shot, focusing on nothing particular—perhaps an umbrella here, a wheeling gull there. The bright blue expanse of white-crested Pacific.

Now the child. Cavorting in the sand, usually, or the edge of the shore, or just sitting quietly perhaps, with plastic pail and shovel. This one had a Day-Glo beach ball, was balancing it on his middle finger like a basketball player. Smiling. Mother smiled, too. They were all so sweet. So innocent. Even as Sonny had once been . . .

The next shot showed the boy's mother.

Young. Pretty. Athletic.

She wore a dark suit, dark glasses, dark glossy hair.

She was lying in the sand on her blanket in this shot, oblivious to the boy, to the ocean, to everything but the warm, bronzing rays, her own private thoughts. Her own private thoughts . . .

Now here was a slide of her sitting up, taking a picture of the boy with one of those new throwaway cameras. Mother didn't like those cameras. Mother didn't like the whole idea of throwaway. It was a throwaway society now. Not the way it had been when she was young. Someday, she thought, we will be throwing away the people themselves. Not that we wouldn't be better off without some of them. . . .

Here was a slide of the young mother talking to a man on the beach. A tall, attractive man. Who was the man, Mother wondered. What were they talking about? Were they talking about the little boy? The slide didn't answer.

And here, at last, was the final picture.

Sonny had done a good job with it. He always did.

It was dark now, so of course he'd had to use the flash. But the old camera still did a pretty good job.

The little boy was gone now, safe at last . . . gone away somewhere like the setting sun, like the fleeting promise of youth. The beach looked alone and quiet, desolate. You couldn't see much of it, only the dark edges just beyond the woman where the probing flash had reached. The rest was scalloped blackness. As black as the woman's hair. As black

as the black swimsuit crumpled beside her pale, naked body.
As black as the dark crust of blood drying there between her
legs. . . .