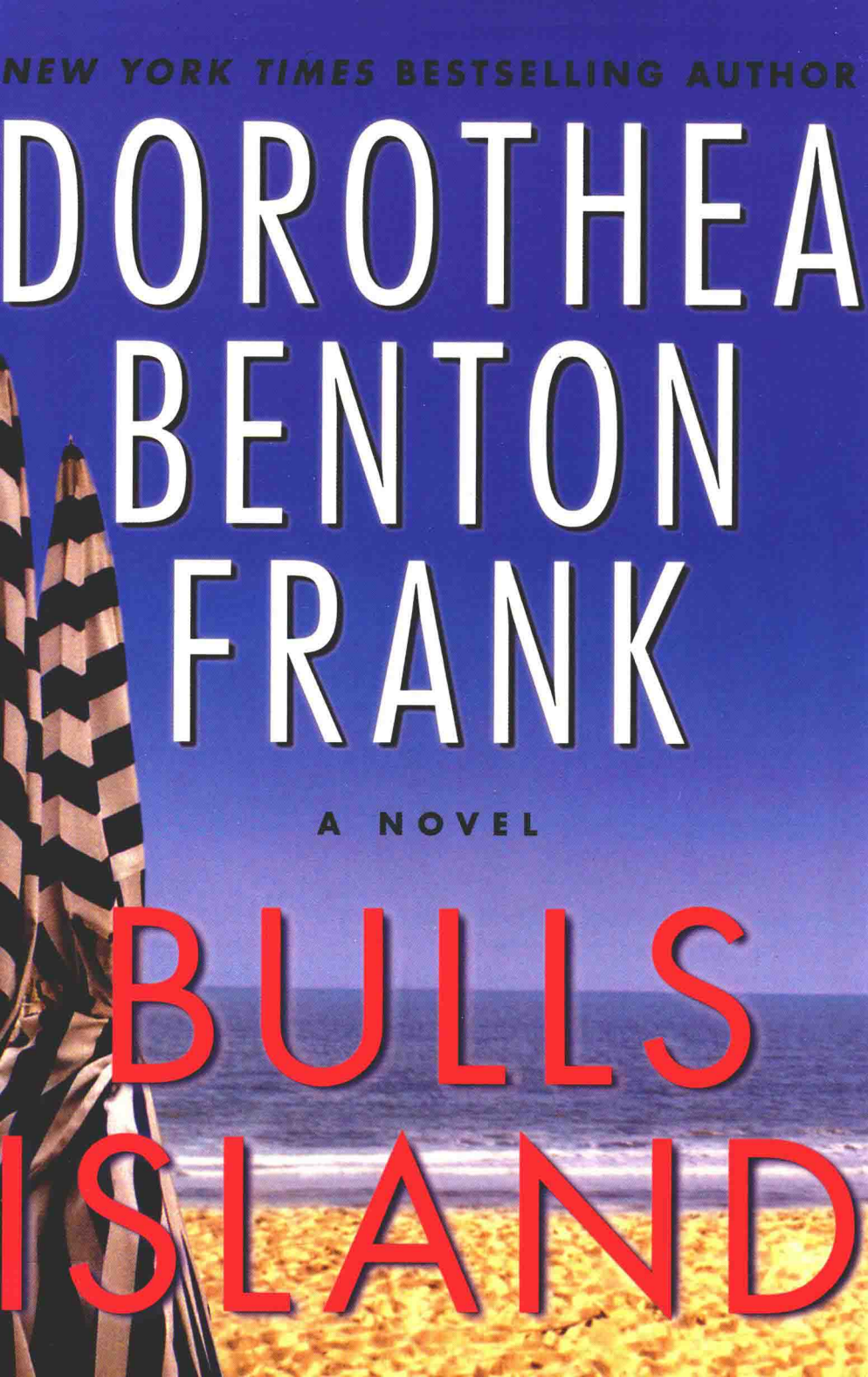


NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DOROTHEA BENTON FRANK

A NOVEL

BULLS ISLAND

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a beach. On the left side, a portion of a beach umbrella with black and white diagonal stripes is visible. The ocean is a deep blue, meeting a lighter blue sky at a distant horizon. The foreground is a wide, golden-yellow sandy beach.

BULLS ISLAND

DOROTHEA
BENTON FRANK

**Doubleday Large Print
Home Library Edition**



WILLIAM MORROW

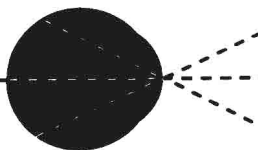
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This book is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogue are drawn from the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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ISBN-13: 978-0-7394-9602-2



**This Large Print Book carries the
Seal of Approval of N.A.V.H.**

Toward the Sea

The wind is an empty place. You enter expecting something softened by the sea.

A piece of cedar shaped into a body you once loved. Perhaps the hand that held you from a distance or the face that simply held you here. Still moving in and out of time during the hour when night meets day, you try to find your bearings.

You pick up objects. You want to remember.

Jagged edged rocks in the palm of your hand.

You hold them up in the moonlight. They are earthbound, filling with sky. You walk on further, pause to scoop tiny iridescent shells, the colors of cream and roses.

Little by little the air brightens into hours, which are either empty or full

of all the things you love and remember, depending on which direction the wind is coming from.

**—Marjory Heath Wentworth,
South Carolina Poet Laureate**

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to my dear friend Marjory Heath Wentworth, South Carolina Poet Laureate, whose spectacular words enrich mine. We are all so proud of you, Marjory, and I am particularly honored to offer one vehicle to share your glorious talent, that of a *living American woman poet*, with readers everywhere. Bravo! Also huge thanks to my dear friend, Dana Beach, founder and executive director of the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League, for so many fabulous plot possibilities and details for this story. This would be just another Beaufort Boil without you! And to my

childhood friend Anthony Stith, fire chief of the Sullivan's Island Fire and Rescue Department, for his explosive ideas!

To my New Jersey literary friends, the geniuses: Pamela Redmond Satran, Deborah Davis, Debbie Galant, Benilde Little, Christina Baker Kline, Mary Jane Clark, and Liza Dawson. Huge thanks for your support and your friendship which I value more than you could know. And my love to all the members of MEWS, which is run by the indefatigable Pamela Redmond Satran, who keeps the five hundred plus writers who live in the Montclair area informed on all issues pertinent to the fun and games of a writing life.

To my South Carolina literary friends, who constantly inspire with their endless wit and the choir of their authentic southern voices: Josephine Humphreys, Walter Edgar, Anne Rivers Siddons, Sue Monk Kidd, Nathalie DuPree, Jack Bass, Tom Blagden, Barbara Hagerty, Robert Rosen, Mary Alice Monroe, William Baldwin, Roger Pinckney, and especially to the sainted one, Cassandra King, whom most of you know is the long-suffering wife of my favorite old grizzly bear, Pat Conroy, who

gave me the courage to write and continues to explain the publishing world to me, one drop of ink at a time. To Jack Alterman, for my youthful author photo and for his photographic genius in general.

To the other real people who appear in this book—Jessamyn “Jessie” Jacobs, Ed O’Farrell, Paul McGrath, and David Pinkham—huge thanks and folks, if their characters act out of character for them, it’s my fault not theirs. And as always, to the out-of-state belles, Rhonda Rich, Mary Kay Andrews, Patti Callahan Henry, and Annabelle Robertson—love y’all madly!

Again thanks to my agent, Larry Krishbaum, for his excellent guidance and grand humor, and his team of wise warriors, for their support, especially Aubrey Lynch who has the most sympathetic ears in New York.

To the William Morrow dream team, beginning with my fearless and brilliant editor, Carrie Feron, whose truly stellar thoughts and suggestions were invaluable in shaping this entire work—Carrie, darlin’, if they like this book, make sure you take a large chunk of the credit! (If they don’t, however, it’s your fault.) Thank you for

everything! And to Jane Friedman, Michael Morrison, Lisa Gallagher, Virginia Stanley, Carla Parker, Michael Morris, Michael Spradlin, Brian Grogan, Donna Waitkus, Rhonda Rose, and Lord knows, to Tessa Woodward—whew! Thank you over and over! And to the marketing and publicity wizards—Debbie Stier, Ben Bruton, Buzzy Porter, Pamela Spengler Jaffee, Lynn Grady, and Tavia Kowalchuk—huge thanks! I curtsy to Liate Stehlik and Adrienne DiPietro from Avon for hundreds of thousands of reasons, to Rick Harris in the audio division, and to the visionaries, Tom Egner and Richard Aquan, for my gorgeous covers.

To Debbie Zammit—what can I tell ya? We're still alive! Thanks for everything, especially the endless hours of scrutiny and your wonderful friendship, compassion, clarity of vision, and humor that saved many a day. To Ann Del Mastro, Mary Allen, George Zur, and Kevin Sherry—you know how much the Franks love all of you and appreciate keeping our mother ship afloat in so many ways. And to Penn Sicre, my friend of many years, for taking the leap (we hope!) from page to screen with *Plantation*.

And to the booksellers—especially Patti Morrison, Larry Morey, Emily Morrison, Rachel Carnes, and every last soul from Barnes & Noble in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina; Tom Warner and Vicki Crafton of Litchfield Books in Pawleys Island; Jennifer McCurry of Waldenbooks in Charleston; Andy and Carrie Graves of Happy Bookseller in Columbia; Frazer Dobson and Sally Brewster at Park Road Books in Charlotte; and to Omar Dowdy, just for the heck of it.

Special bowing and scraping to my wonderful cousin Charles “Comar” Blanchard Jr., whom we adore for who he is and to whom we owe enormous gratitude for everything he does. And additional bowing and scraping, plus a kiss, to my fabulous brother-in-law, Scott Bagnol, of Edisto Beach, South Carolina, for the inside skinny on how to catch mud minnows and the education on Jon boats. And to Jay Adams for setting me straight on Virginia Gentleman, the best bourbon in the world. Cheers!

Obviously, the bulk of all my thanks I should place at the feet of my wonderful, brilliant, handsome husband, Peter, and

our two gorgeous, outrageously funny, and smart, nearly adult children, Victoria and William. We are so proud of you, and I thank you for understanding this crazy career of mine and always rolling with the insanity with such warmth and love. I love you all with all I've got. Seriously, I love you and thanks!

And to my readers? I thank you again and again for all your nice e-mails, for coming out to book signings, and for being so great in every way. Your generous words of support keep me going in the tough moments, and I mean that from the bottom of my heart.

All this, all of this, is no "bull!" Love you all!

BULLS ISLAND

CHAPTER ONE

Meet Betts

Trouble. In the charcoal shadows that delivered dawn to day in my Manhattan apartment, trouble lurked like a horrible thief. It would snatch my guilty life out of my pocket. I could sense but not pinpoint the exact location. It did not matter. Trouble would get me anyway. Trouble so practiced and seasoned that I would never know its clammy hand, each fingertip as light as feathers had been there mocking me the whole way to ruination. Except for one telling detail. Before I threw back my bedcovers, before I even glanced at my alarm clock, my left eyelid had begun to

twitch in earnest. Always a redoubtable warning of approaching and certain disaster. My heart pounded. Was it a dream?

Moments later, real life began again. My cell phone rang *and* vibrated against the blond wood of my bedside table. It was my secretary, Sandi, calling to say Ben Bruton wanted to see me that morning. Wonderful. I was to begin my day with an audience with the Great and Terrible Oz. Not to mention I had a scheduled meeting later that morning with a gaggle of fast-talking suits from Tokyo.

Swell. No one at my level was called to see Bruton unless he wanted you dead and out of his life—or your status was to improve vastly. I had no reason to fear for my position and no reason to believe I was in line for anything except to continue what I had been doing for the past four years—evaluating and restructuring the distressed properties in our portfolio. Sounds boring? Anything but. Trust me.

I was late, which was unusual. Normally, I'm up at six. My nerves got in between me and everything I had to do. As I dressed, I pushed my toe through an expensive pair of Wolford panty hose, jabbed my eyeliner

into the white of my eye, spilled tea on my shirt, on and on it went until I finally got out the door.

I rushed the nine and one-half blocks from Park and Sixty-first to work dodging traffic, juggling my Tazo chai, my handbag, the *Wall Street Journal*, and my briefcase. *Click, click, click.* The heels of my Prada pumps clicked and echoed in my ears as I hurried across the rose-colored, gold-speckled granite floor of the lobby. In my peripheral vision, I spotted Dennis Baker swinging into action, moving toward me like a PI, knowing he had caught my eye.

Why was he always following me? He made my skin crawl. I slipped into an empty elevator, his arm caught the closing door, and I was trapped.

"You look great today. New dress?" he said, exuding enough testosterone to impregnate every female in the five boroughs of New York City.

Except me.

"Thank you." I avoided eye contact and his question.

He leaned against the opposite wall, put his hands in his pockets, and struggled to

look adorable. "So, let me ask you something, McGee."

"What?"

"Why aren't you committed to someone who could, you know, see about all your needs? Too risky to get involved?"

"It's not about money, Dennis," I said, looking directly at him without a shred of warmth. "It's about my survival. And since when is my life your business?"

Disbelieving, Dennis Baker's obnoxious eyes surveyed me as though he could not imagine what I struggled to overcome. In his opinion I had no problems because money was the great cure-all. As if I was rolling in it. Would that it were so.

"I've been watching you. And . . . just curious, I guess." Next, with what I'm sure he deemed considerable insight, he said, "Well then, it must be about power. Why you work so hard and why you're such a loner? A relationship might distract your focus and therefore dilute your power. Am I right?"

"Nooooo," I said, assuring him that I had no interest in chatting with him for the minute it took us to rise from the thirty-eighth-floor lobby to the seventieth

floor. Any and all conversation with him was exasperating. I stood rooted to my side of the elevator and stared up at the rapidly changing red digital trailer of weather and news.

I said to myself, no, it *wasn't* about power. It actually *was* all about survival. Was it easy for a woman to make it in this business? No. You had to be twice as right, twice as qualified, and twice as anything else the assignment required.

Relieved when the doors opened, I left him to slither back to his cubicle on the sixty-eighth floor.

"Have a great day," he said.

"See ya." I said. Loser.

Dennis was like a swarm of gnats at dusk, annoying and confident that he would eventually get to you. He was fortunate that I had not reported him to human resources for sexual harassment and that I spoke to him at all.

Dennis Baker was one of a dozen male and female secretaries with a degree in chiropractic medicine, culinary arts, or medieval literature who hunted the halls like a hungry animal, searching for prey, married or single, with a mid-seven-figure income