
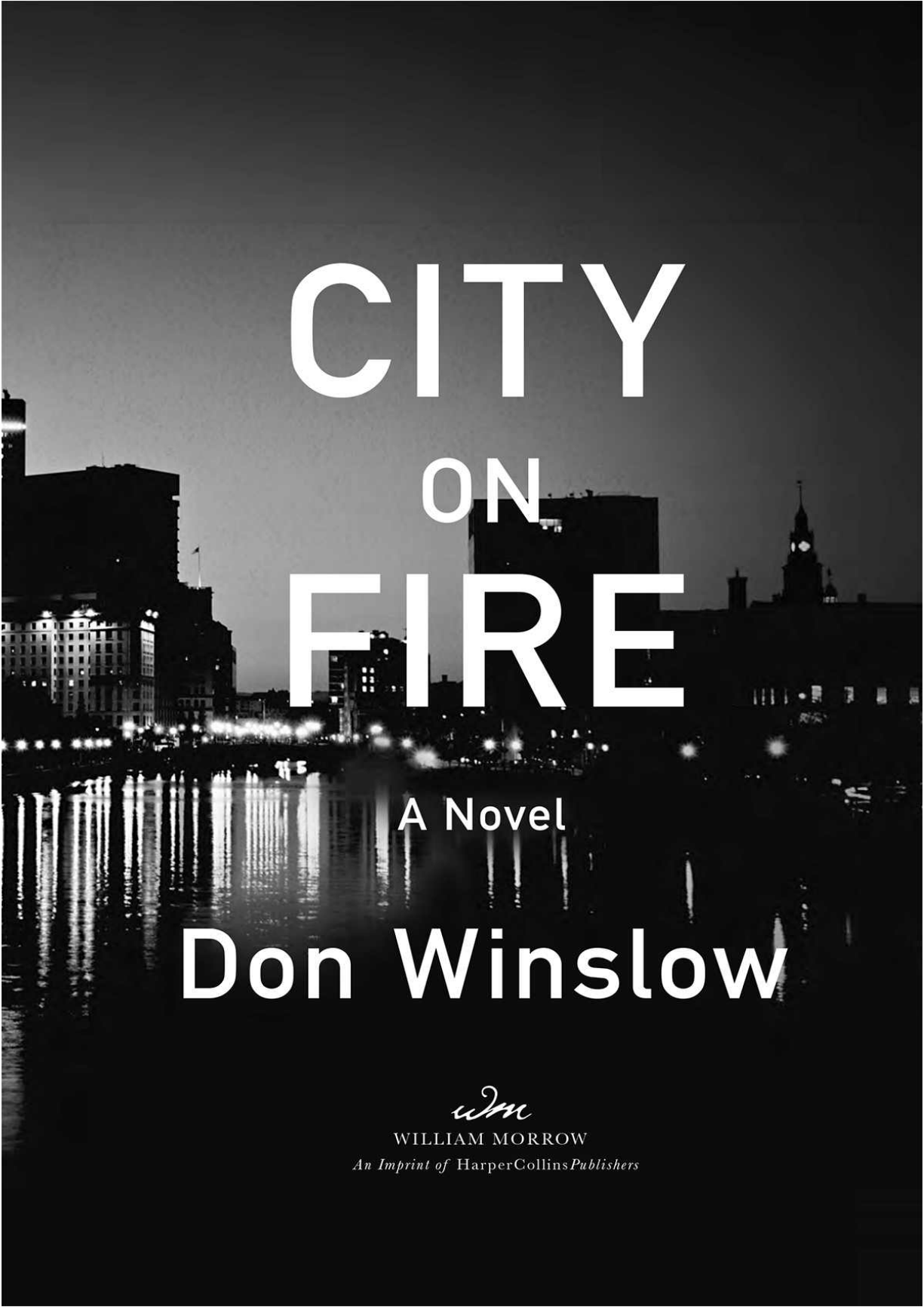


NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE BORDER AND THE FORCE

DON  
WINSLOW  
CITY ON  
FIRE

A silhouette of a man in a suit, standing with his hands at his sides, positioned within the letter 'C' of the word 'CITY' in the title.

A NOVEL



CITY  
ON  
FIRE

A Novel

Don Winslow

*wm*

WILLIAM MORROW

*An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers*



# Dedication

*To the deceased of the pandemic.*  
Requiescat in pace.

# Epigraph

Then at last

I saw it all, all Ilium settling into her embers . . .

Virgil

*The Aeneid*

Book II

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Part One  
**Pasco Ferri's Clambake**

*Goshen Beach, Rhode Island*  
*August 1986*

Take your meal, now; we prepare for combat.

Homer  
*The Iliad*  
Book II



# One

Danny Ryan watches the woman come out of the water like a vision emerging from his dreams of the sea.

Except she's real and she's going to be trouble.

Women that beautiful usually are.

Danny knows that; what he doesn't know is just how much trouble she's really going to be. If he knew that, knew everything that was going to happen, he might have walked into the water and held her head under until she stopped moving.

But he doesn't know that.

So, the bright sun striking his face, Danny sits on the sand out in front of Pasco's beach house and checks her out from behind the cover of his sunglasses. Blond hair, deep blue eyes, and a body that the black bikini does more to accentuate than conceal. Her stomach is taut and flat, her legs muscled and sleek. You don't see her fifteen years from now with wide hips and a big ass from the potatoes and the Sunday gravy.

The woman comes out of the water, her skin glistening with sunshine and salt.

Terri Ryan digs an elbow into her husband's ribs.

"What?" Danny asks, all mock-innocent.

"I see you checking her out," Terri says.

They're all checking her out—him, Pat and Jimmy, and the wives, too—Sheila, Angie, and Terri.

"Can't say I blame you," Terri says. "That rack."

"Nice talk," Danny says.

"Yeah, with what *you're* thinking?" Terri asks.

“I ain’t thinking nothing.”

“I got your nothing for you right here,” Terri says, moving her right hand up and down. She sits up on her towel to get a better view of the woman. “If I had boobs like that, I’d wear a bikini, too.”

Terri’s wearing a one-piece black number. Danny thinks she looks good in it.

“I like *your* boobs,” Danny says.

“Good answer.”

Danny watches the beautiful woman as she picks up a towel and dries herself off. She must put in a lot of time at the gym, he thinks. Takes care of herself. He bets she works in sales. Something pricey—luxury cars, or maybe real estate, or investments. What guy is going to say no to her, try to bargain her down, look cheap in front of her? Isn’t going to happen.

Danny watches her walk away.

Like a dream you wake up from and you don’t want to wake up, it’s such a good dream.

Not that he got much sleep last night, and now he’s tired. They hit a truckload of Armani suits, him and Pat and Jimmy MacNeese, way the hell up in western Mass. Piece of cake, an inside job Peter Moretti set them up with. The driver was clued in, everyone did the dance so no one got hurt, but still it was a long drive and they got back to the shore just as the sun was coming up.

“That’s okay,” Terri says, lying back on her towel. “You let her get you all hot and bothered for me.”

Terri knows her husband loves her, and anyway, Danny Ryan is faithful like a dog. He don’t have it in him to cheat. She don’t mind he looks at other women as long as he brings it home to her. A lot of married guys, they need some strange every once in a while, but Danny don’t.

Even if he did, he’d feel too guilty.

They’ve even joked about it. “You’d confess to the priest,” Terri said, “you’d confess to me, you’d probably take an ad out in the paper to confess.”

She’s right, Danny thinks as he reaches over and strokes Terri’s thigh with the back of his index finger, signaling that she’s right about something else, that he *is* hot and bothered, that it’s time to go back to the cottage. Terri brushes his hand away, but not too hard. She’s horny, too, feeling the

sun, the warm sand on her skin, and the sexual energy brought by the new woman.

It's in the air, they both feel it.

Something else, too.

Restlessness? Danny wonders. Discontent?

Like this sexy woman comes out of the sea and suddenly they're not quite satisfied with their lives.

I'm not, Danny thinks.

Every August they come down from Dogtown to Goshen Beach because that's what their fathers did and they don't know to do anything else. Danny and Terri, Jimmy and Angie Mac, Pat and Sheila Murphy, Liam Murphy with his girl of the moment. They rent the little cottages across the road from the beach, so close to each other you can hear your neighbor sneeze, or lean out the window to borrow something for the kitchen. But that's what makes it fun, the closeness.

None of them would know what to do with solitude. They grew up in the same Providence neighborhood their parents did, went to school there, are still there, see each other almost every day and go down to Goshen on vacation together.

"Dogtown by the Sea," they call it.

Danny always thinks the ocean should be to the east, but knows that the beach actually faces south and runs in a gentle arc west about a mile to Mashanuck Point, where some larger houses perch precariously on a low bluff above the rocks. To the south, fourteen miles out in the open ocean, sits Block Island, visible on most clear days. During the summer season, ferries run all day and into the night from the docks at Gilead, the fishing village just across the channel.

Danny, he used to go out to Block Island all the time, not on the ferry, but back before he was married when he was working the fishing boats. Sometimes, if Dick Sousa was in a good mood, they'd pull into New Harbor and grab a beer before making the run home.

Those were good days, going after the swordfish with Dick, and Danny misses them. Misses the little cottage he rented behind Aunt Betty's Clam Shack, even though it was drafty and colder than shit in the winter. Misses walking down to the bar at the Harbor Inn to have a drink with the fishermen and listen to their stories, learn their wisdom. Misses the physical work that made him feel strong and clean. He was nineteen and strong and

clean and now he ain't none of those things; a layer of fat has grown around his middle and he ain't sure he could throw a harpoon or haul in a net.

You look at Danny now, in his late twenties, his broad shoulders make him appear a little shorter than his six feet, and his thick brown hair, tinged with red, gives him a low forehead that makes him look a little less smart than he really is.

Danny sits on the sand and looks at the water with a yearning. The most he does now is go in and have a swim or bodysurf if there are any waves, which is unusual in August unless there's a hurricane brewing.

Danny misses the ocean when he's not here.

It gets in your blood, like you got salt water running through you. The fishermen Danny knows love the sea and hate it, say it's like a cruel woman who hurts you over and over again but you keep going back to her anyway.

Sometimes he thinks maybe he should go back to fishing, but there's no money in it. Not anymore, with all the government regulations and the Japanese and Russian factory ships sitting thirteen miles off the coast and taking up all the cod and the tuna and the flounder and the government don't do shit about them, just keeps its thumb on the local guy.

Because it can.

So now Danny just comes down from Providence in August with the rest of the gang.

Mornings they get up late, eat breakfast in their cottages, then cross the road and spend the day gathered on the beach in front of Pasco's place, one of about a dozen clapboard houses set on concrete pylons near the breakwater on the east end of Goshen Beach.

They set up beach chairs, or just lie on towels, and the women sip wine coolers and read magazines and chat while the men drink beer or throw in a fishing line. There's always a nice little crowd there, Pasco and his wife and kids and grandkids, and the whole Moretti crew—Peter and Paul Moretti, Sal Antonucci, Tony Romano, Chris Palumbo and wives and kids.

Always a lot of people dropping by, coming in and out, having a good time.

Rainy days they sit in the cottages and do jigsaw puzzles, play cards, take naps, shoot the shit, listen to the Sox broadcasters jaw their way through the rain delay. Or maybe drive into the main town two miles inland and see a movie or get an ice cream or pick up some groceries.

Nights, they barbecue on the strips of lawn between the cottages, usually pooling their resources, grill hamburgs and hot dogs. Or maybe during the day one of the guys walks over to the docks to see what's fresh and that night they grill tuna or bluefish or boil some lobsters.

Other nights they walk down to Dave's Dock, sit at a table out on the big deck that overlooks Gilead, across the narrow bay. Dave's doesn't have a liquor license, so they bring their own bottles of wine and beer, and Danny loves sitting out there watching the fishing boats, the lobstermen, or the Block Island Ferry come in as he eats chowder and fish-and-chips and greasy clam cakes. It's pretty and peaceful out there as the sun softens and the water glows in the dusk.

Some nights they just walk home after dinner, gather in each other's cottages for more cards and conversations; other times maybe they drive over to Mashanuck Point, where there's a bar, the Spindrifft. Sit and have a few drinks and listen to some local bar band, maybe dance a little, maybe not. But usually the whole gang ends up there and it's always a lot of laughs until closing time.

If they feel more ambitious, they pile into cars and drive over to Gilead—fifty yards by water but fourteen miles by road—where there are some larger bars that almost pass for clubs and where the Morettis don't expect and never receive a drink bill. Then they go home to their cottages and Danny and Terri either pass out or mess around and *then* pass out, and wake up late and do it all over again.

"I need some more losh," Terri says now, handing him the tube.

Danny sits up, squeezes a glob of the suntan lotion onto his hands, and starts to work it onto her freckled shoulders. Terri burns easy with that Irish skin. Black hair, violet eyes, and skin like a porcelain teacup.

The Ryans are darker-skinned, and Danny's old man, Marty, says that's because they got Spanish blood in them. "From when that armada sank back there. Some of them Spanish sailors made it to shore and did the deed."

They're all black Irish, anyway, northerners like most of the micks who landed in Providence. Hard men from the stony soil and constant defeat of Donegal. Except, Danny thinks, the Murphys are doing pretty good for themselves now. Then he feels guilty thinking that, because Pat Murphy's been his best friend since they were in diapers, not to mention now they're brothers-in-law.

Sheila Murphy lifts her arms, yawns and says, “I’m going to go back, take a shower, do my nails, girly stuff.” She gets up from her blanket and brushes the sand off her legs. Angie gets up, too. Like Pat is the leader of the men, Sheila is the boss of the wives. They take their cues from her.

She looks down at Pat and asks, “You coming?”

Danny looks at Pat and they both smile—the couples are all going back to have sex and no one’s even being subtle about it. The cottages are going to be busy places this afternoon.

Danny’s sad that summer is coming to an end. He always is. The end of summer means the end of the long slow days, the lingering sunsets, the rented beach cottages, the beers, the fun, the laughs, the clambakes.

It’s back to Providence, back to the docks, back to work.

Home to their little apartment on the top floor of a gabled three-decker in the city, one of the thousands of old tenement buildings that went up all over New England in the height of the mill and factory days, when they were needed to provide cheap housing for the Italian, Jewish, and Irish workers. The mills and factories are mostly gone, but the three-story houses survive and still have a little of the lower-class reputation about them.

Danny and Terri have a small living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a bedroom with a small porch out the back and windows on every side, which is nice. It ain’t much—Danny hopes to buy them a real house someday—but it’s enough for now and it ain’t so bad. Mrs. Costigan on the floor below is a quiet old lady and the owner, Mr. Riley, lives on the ground floor, so he keeps everything pretty shipshape.

Still and all, Danny thinks about getting out of there, maybe out of Providence altogether.

“Maybe we should move someplace where it’s summer all the time,” he said to Terri just the night before.

“Like where?” she asked.

“California, maybe.”

She laughed at him. “California? We got no family in California.”

“I got a second cousin or something in San Diego.”

“That’s not really family,” Terri says.

Yeah, maybe that’s the point, Danny thinks now. Maybe it would be good to go somewhere they don’t have all those obligations—the birthday parties, the first communions, the mandatory Sunday dinners. But he knows

it won't happen—Terri is too attached to her large family, and his old man needs him.

Nobody ever leaves Dogtown.

Or if they do, they come back.

Danny did.

Now he wants to go back to the cottage.

He wants to get laid and then he wants a nap.

Danny could use a little sleep, feel fresh for Pasco Ferri's clambake.