

## CHAPTER 1

### THE WOMAN ON DERRY STREET (HOW IT BEGAN)

*I was one of the first to see the naked woman stumbling down Derry street.*

She listed to her left, then to her right, like a small boat in a rolling tide. Her arms hung loosely down her sides, and as the street level angled lower, her knees began to wobble. I thought for sure she would face plant into the asphalt at any second.

I ran to the back of the store and grabbed as many packing blankets as I could carry. I yelled for Jimmy, my checker and carryout boy:

“JIMMY! RUN AND GET AS MANY TOWELS AS YOU CAN FIND! RUN THEM UNDER COLD WATER UNTIL THEY’RE SOAKED. BRING THEM OUT FRONT. GRAB ICE IF YOU CAN CARRY IT. HURRY!

Jimmy didn't say anything, just dashed to the storage closet.

As the naked woman got closer, it seemed as if the crowd along the sidewalk had doubled, perhaps trebled, but no one approached to help her.

The temperature had to be pushing 95, and the macadam probably added an extra 30 degrees. Her bare feet had to be on fire.

I was close enough to catch her in one of the blankets when she finally went down. She fell into the garment, then immediately began sliding through it. I held her close, then as gently as possible, laid her down.

Jimmy was running full blast toward us. He had a good wad of towels, and when he gave me the first one, it was wet and cool. He ripped an opening in a bag of ice, and we poured that on top of the towels.

“Here, Jimmy. Help me.”

“Oh, Jeez. She's hot as a furnace.” Jimmy seemed on the verge of crying.

“And we need to adjust her damper,” I said.

I opened one side of the moving blanket (trying to hide her nakedness as much as possible) and Jimmy did the same on the other side. I took towel after wet towel and began placing them on every area of her body

The bottom of her feet were badly blistered. I put ice in each towel and hurriedly wrapped them.

I saw George Hunt coming out of his barber shop. “George! Call 911 and make it quick!”

He disappeared back into his shop.

Her lips were puffy and cracked. She moaned so faintly that I didn't know if I was actually hearing it at first. I started to place a wet towel on her mouth.

And then I know, without a doubt, she forced a smile, with those blistered lips as thin as a razor cut, and I swear, it was a smile of gratitude.

Before her body went totally slack and her eyes closed, she whispered three words:

“Help my son.”