

Chapter 1

There is a Magic Moment in South Florida experienced by few, if any, tourists. Not by exhausted families from Iowa or Minnesota or New Jersey, legs throbbing, wallets empty, asleep in their hotel rooms with air conditioners moaning, rattling like asthmatic coffee grinders; not by sunburned college students having arrived expectantly with “SSSS” scrawled on the flanks of mommy’s and daddy’s cars—Sun, Surf, Suds, and Sex; and, not by the jet set who’s knowledge of Florida is a private plane, a condo on the beach, and throbbing music until four o’clock in the morning in chic clubs on South Beach. No, to witness the Magic Moment you have to be a native, and still, you have to be lucky.

Before dawn when the sun is still far out over the Atlantic horizon its rays may bounce off the humid air hovering like a giant lens over the Florida peninsula, creating a false dawn. It doesn’t last long, only a brief instant. Were there clouds, Midwesterners would swear it was a brief flash of heat lightning. If you aren’t watching for it, it’s gone like the ineffectual strobe from a camera’s undercharged flash.

But to make it truly magic, another variable must come into play, and that’s why even natives may never experience it. To be truly magical, there must also be a stillness seldom experienced among the mass of humanity clinging to Florida’s eastern coastline: no dogs would bark, no doors would slam; no cars would roar or radios blast. Babies would sleep and drool without crying; there would be no harsh

words, or slaps, or fearful screams in the early morning darkness. Birds would noiselessly roost and the great beast that is Miami would take a breath, hold it, and for a moment the world would be perfectly still. There would be a pause in the Miami lullaby.

Experiencing the Magic Moment should be refreshing, renewing—a religious experience in a place that worships sun and fun. A morning like that should make you glad to be alive.

But it wasn't going to be a morning like that, at all.