



## Chapter 1

Rickie Ciprian snuggled into the sheets next to his wife, enjoying the languid moment between awakening and drifting off to sleep again. He momentarily considered getting up, maybe fixing coffee, steaming and ready when Roxy awoke. He could stand on his front porch and see the start of a new day. But sleep's soft tendrils wrapped around him, refusing to release its grip, drawing him back into the comforting and familiar darkness of early morning.

Born and reared in the Sunshine State, Rickie often bragged of a South Florida Magic Moment few tourists experienced. Exhausted families from Iowa or Minnesota or New Jersey missed the moment, legs throbbing, wallets

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empty, asleep in their hotel rooms with air conditioners moaning and rattling like asthmatic coffee grinders. Sunburned college students, arriving expectantly with “S-S-S-S” scrawled on the flanks of mommy’s and daddy’s cars—Sun, Surf, Sand, Suds, and Sex—slept through the chance of seeing it. The jet set knew only private planes, condos, and throbbing South Beach music until four o’clock in the morning. Even a native like Rickie needed luck to witness the Magic Moment.

Before dawn, when the sun rests far out over the Atlantic horizon, its rays may bounce off the humid air hovering like a giant lens over the Florida peninsula, and create a false dawn. It doesn’t last long, only an instant. Were there clouds, Midwesterners would swear they saw a flash of heat lightning in the distance. Watch for it and the momentary brightness is still gone like the

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ineffectual strobe from a camera's undercharged flash.

But to make it truly magic, another variable must come into play, and that's why Rickie had briefly considered leaving the warmth of his bed and wife to stand in the chill air and look into the sky.

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 of Miami would take a breath and hold it, and for a moment the world would be perfectly still. There would be a pause in the Miami lullaby.

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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 you are alive.

Rickie missed his Magic Moment. It wouldn't be a morning like that at all.