

# Chapter Four

## *Different Wokes for Different Folks*

Out on the west side of Boca Raton, I turn out of Dr. Ang's parking lot and make my way back to 1-95. At the highway, I hit the northbound ramp and mash the gas. So much has changed in Palm Beach County over the last ten to fifteen years, especially on the east side of 1-95. If you're headed north, the first city over the county line is Boca Raton.

Everyone's heard of it.

If you haven't, let me tell you about the place. In Spanish, *boca raton* translates to "mouth of the rat." Which is quite ironic considering the lack of Spanish *residentas* in the area. It's the high-rent district. The city of three Ps, I call it: pompous, prissy, pretentious. Every cliché you can dream up. Lots of Karens and Kens sporting sweaters tied around their necks, khakis paired with pink Polos, and Penny Loafers.

It's far-right, lily-white crackers—mostly Matzah.

A short jog north is Lake Worth. No Spanish translation. Meanwhile, the place is flooded with Mexicans from all walks of life. A seeming contradiction, considering none of them can surf, and Lake Worth is Surf Town, USA. There's high-rent, low-rent, and for the homeless, no rent. It's gluten-free pizzas and almond milk lattes and almost everyone's woke. Still the sweater around the neck, only sometimes nothing else. Trust me when I tell ya.

It's leather chaps, body paint, bondage.

A big fruit salad hold the melons.

A little farther north and you can smell the opulence in the salty air. From the city of Manalapan all the way up through the Island of Palm Beach. Big, big money. Private jets. Mega-mansions. Rolls Royce's. Names like Trump, Fitzgerald, Rothschild. No sweaters. No body paint. Not woke. Maybe some bondage.

Definitely black tie and silver spoons.

It's truffles, souffles, and caviar—all served by the help.

Over the bridge and through the city we go to West Palm Beach. It's different folks with different wokes. White, black, brown, and a few Asians. If we were to stick with the food groups, West Palm Beach would be Ruth Chris, Tom's BBQ, Cuban sandwiches...and egg drop soup. All served on the same corner.

This is where I live, work, and sometimes play.

I exit 1-95 at Southern Boulevard and head west. At Congress Avenue, I turn left. Hit the red light at Gun Club Road and wait. This is one of the gritty neighborhoods of West Palm. Lots of pawn, skin, and smoke shops. The light turns green, and I make a right. Up on the left is me.

Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

The parking lot is full of Chevys, Toyotas, Fords, and one Hummer. The building is full of high school bullies wearing uniforms and guns, middle-aged housewives in need of a second income, and a slew of detectives running around chasin' a caseload they can't manage.

I park Loca Moca at the far end of the lot all by herself. She's snooty. Not a fan of door dings. I unlock the trunk and grab my service weapon from the lockbox. I stick the piece in my waistband, just like the bad guys. I carry a 9mm Glock.

Nothing fancy, but it stops 'em in their tracks.

I know, you've watched a lot of TV. The detectives always wear five o'clock shadows and those nifty shoulder holsters under their suit jackets. That's Hollywood. Try being shot at while having to fumble inside a jacket to unsnap your gun. Why do you think the bad guys keep their heat in their waistbands? Plus, it's South Florida, no chance I'm wearing a suit. I'm in a pair of Tommy Bahama drawstring linen pants with a designer T-shirt and Mark Nason slip-ons. No socks.

Again, nothing fancy, but it stops 'em in their tracks.

I'm going to let you in on something. Not everyone around here considers me a bursting ray of sunshine. They think I'm an egomaniac, looking to get my name in the papers. Which is fucking hilarious because I hate the media. But when the chief calls me in to save the day on all the big cases, it makes me look like a glory hound and a suck-up. I've had run-ins with some of the guys over it.

It's never pretty.

I've never lost, and that only makes it worse.

I look at the front doors, covered in reflective tint, and know my fellow officers are staring back at me. They all know I was suspended. And now there are rumors of a new monster floating around, and in walks me. Even these halfwits can put two and two together.

I square my shoulders, pretending I don't know my name is on the tip of everyone's tongue, as I open the door and walk in. Right away, I'm hit with cool air and judgment. It's a room full of unfriendly eyes among a sandstorm of hushed conversations. I feign indifference and move toward the back stairwell.

The room's a sardine can of the usual scum: hookers, johns, pimps, druggies, dealers, and drunks. Most of them repeat offenders. On the other side of the table, lawyers, witnesses, family, and friends. Like always, both sides claiming innocence. I nod toward Michael Rubin—Palm Beaches' slickest defense attorney—and wonder whose cage he's rattling now. He nods back with a look that says, *I'll have him out in an hour*, and he probably will.

I'm almost to the stairs when a road deputy approaches me. My name's Mehan. Irish guy out of New York. "Hey, Storm," he says, "Whadda ya call a perp with two black eyes?"

I shrug.

"Nothin'! You've already told him twice." He laughs.

I actually feel bad for the guy. A few weeks back, a couple of detectives were staking out Boxers and Briefs, a gay bar on the seedy side of West Palm, when they spotted Mehan walking up. He went inside. Thirty minutes later, Mehan walked back out, holding hands with a man wearing leather pants and a fishnet shirt.

There is no "don't ask, don't tell" rule in effect at the PBSO.

I keep moving up the stairs, two at a time, to Homicide.

Up here, it's more of a unit. The air isn't quite as cumbersome. There's still a touch of skepticism, but it doesn't reach the eyes of the other detectives. Maybe it's more of a professional courtesy than anything else. Hard to tell, most of these guys play it close to the vest.

The detectives who aren't out searching for the truth are sitting behind their desks, behind the glass. I can see them through the blinds. I get a couple of "hellos" and a silent nod or two, as I make my way down the hall to my office, glad to see my name's still on the door.

This is my first time back since the suspension. I kick open the door and flick the lights on. It smells like wet towel. It's my office, though, and there is something to that. The place still looks like a shrine. The back wall is covered with pictures of children between the ages of seven and fifteen. All of them dead. All victims of the child molester the public dubbed "the Peddler."

He's the guy I'm currently in hot water over.

There's a local newspaper from three weeks back on top of my desk. I've made the front-page news...again. "The Peddler Meets the Imperfect Storm!" One of my jackass colleagues must think that without his help, I'd know nothing of this article. On top, there's a Post-it note: *Nice job, asshole!*

Under that, there's me, leading a cuffed Levin Rubenstein into the FBI building in downtown West Palm Beach. He appears to have been ruffed up a bit. You can see something thick and dark running down his cheek, pooled up on his shirt collar.

The article goes on to explain that because of my actions, past and present, the perv might walk. He won't, but this is what the press does.