

SOUTH BEACH STAR



**A Fictional Tale of Fame,
Glamour, Drugs and Destruction**

James Cubby

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By James Cubby

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Fame is an illusive thing — here today, gone tomorrow. The fickle, shallow mob raises its heroes to the pinnacle of approval today and hurls them into oblivion tomorrow at the slightest whim; cheers today, hisses tomorrow; utter forgetfulness in a few months.

—Henry Miller

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Gilbert Stafford and everyone who ever passed through his velvet ropes.

1997

ONE

A New Kidd

White hair a la Jean Paul Gaultier was just the touch I needed to strut among the fabulous shallow South Beach royalty and even pass as one myself. Michael, my good friend and hairdresser, had bleached away my oh-so-boring brown hair color giving me the new “It’s All About Me” look I needed to be noticed and visually hip enough to mingle with the crème de la crème of the South Beach nightlife circuit that included celebrities like Madonna, Gloria Estefan, Prince, Gianni Versace, Calvin Klein, David Geffen, Barry Diller, Mickey Rourke, Kate Moss, Donald Trump, Leonardo De Caprio and as well as some of the top models and photographers in the world. Of course, let’s not forget the pioneers of South Beach who made it all happen, the gays and the international circuit boys who come to South Beach every year for the world famous White Party at Vizcaya, which was the forerunner for the “circuit” and continues to set the party standard. This world-renowned event attracts nearly 15,000 gay party boys from all over the world for a week of events, the highlight being an over-the-top fête that takes ostentatious to the extreme, held on the grounds of an opulent Italianate villa located on Biscayne Bay. Those who think these international circuit parties are just massive orgies with music aren’t far from the truth, however this one happens to be a creative and well-produced fundraiser for a very good cause. While thousands of dollars in funds are raised, the focus of the week is primarily sex and drugs.

For at least a month before the event every South Beach store window displays white clothes, white accessories, white jewelry, and anything else white since white is the required dress for the gala. Gay circuit boys spend months working on elaborate and often expensive costumes comprised of beads, bangles, sequins and feathers that act as frames for their gorgeous bodies so when they’re not sewing they’re at the gym so they’ll be pumped up for this non-stop party. The muscle boys come in groups wearing white jockstraps and large wings made of feathers, although you’d be hard pressed to find a real angel in this group. Most of their costumes are designed to reveal as much skin as possible and be removed quickly.

This being my first White Party Week and my introduction to the circuit scene, I thought I might as well be introduced as a sleek platinum-coiffed journalist hoping that it would give me a little sex appeal. I had spent my life trying to become a serious journalist and even had a book in the works but for now it was on the back-burner since my new job took all my time. When I inaugurated my nightlife column I used Kidd, my last name, as my byline. As a result everyone started calling me Kidd. At first it seemed odd but it was another step to a new life so I went with it. So, with this White Party I christened myself Kidd. I figured that’s one way to stay a kid forever, if only on paper, yet at the time I was a young-looking thirty-something. At least that’s what I kept telling myself.

I’m not sure if it was luck or fate that had made me the hot new celebrity nightlife reporter for the *South Beach Star* but if anyone asked, I’d say it was the result of hard work and incredibly long hours. In my wildest dreams, I would never have dreamt of myself in the situation where I had landed. I had never even considered covering something as frivolous as nightlife and my goal had been to be a published novelist before I reached thirty-five but here I was covering the South Beach nightlife

scene. Being a popular columnist wasn't enough for South Beach and I needed a little help being fabulous even though I was having a ball playing shallow. I had not spent my life hanging with the literary geniuses of the world but the crowd I had infiltrated were more interested in fashion trends, celebrities, and club openings than current events or novels. Luckily my dry wit and blatant honesty were welcomed, which was quite surprising in a town where phony and shallowness were the norm and lies were expected. The Beach was full of one-dimensional people and I had to constantly bite my tongue to silence the wise cracks and put-downs whenever someone made some dim-witted comment. Not that I'm such a critical person but the people were walking stereotypes screaming for attention. In print, nobody was safe but it seemed like all anyone cared about was having their name mentioned in print. I could literally rip someone to shreds but if I ran a photo of them with their name in the caption, I was a hero in their eyes.

Problem is, nobody reads in this town, unless it's a feature about themselves or the captions that accompany the photo pages of every publication in town. Phrases like "Did you see my photo in *South Beach*?" or "I saw your photo in the *Star*," were typically thrown about like greetings. Everyone in South Beach is fabulous, just ask them.

Actually, you don't have to ask, they'll tell you, dropping the names of their famous friends, or acquaintances as part of the conversation. And what really amazed me were the South Beach drag queens, like no where else in the world, were considered celebrities and even photographed and pampered like stars. But the fabulous quotient didn't stop there. Almost every man, woman and busboy in South Beach was a star in the making. The Beach was famous for its rags to riches stories. Madonna had a child with her trainer so he became a star. Yes, one day a busboy or a lifeguard, then next a Bruce Weber discovery modeling all over the world. So everyone was a star, some just hadn't been discovered yet. And there was nothing sexier than fame.

Sitting in Michael's chair, I could hardly believe I was staring at my own reflection in the mirror, a white-haired reincarnation of the once dull, brown-haired writer whose face I was used to seeing in the mirror. Michael ran his fingers through the new whiteness for my entertainment as I gazed at the two of us in the mirror. Michael was a handsome hipster who dressed the part and was a notorious flirt but I knew not to wander down that path. I didn't want to have to search for another hair dresser.

"Everyone's talking about the big party tonight," Michael whispered in my ear. "And you get to go to the party, you fucker."

"I'm sure it'll be a big bore," I said, trying to seem blasé about the whole thing. "You know it's just work, but I must admit I'm dying to see the inside of Madonna's house." I was actually creaming my pants. Madonna's party was a private cocktail reception given by Miss Blonde Ambition herself with an invitation list of only 75. God knows how I got invited. I guess I'd become more important than I thought but whatever the reason, I had planned on making a good impression and working it to the max. I heard that the press wasn't invited except for Tasha Simon who was known as "Queen of the Night," the name of her weekly gossip column for the *Miami Herald*, and me, who had not yet accepted any royal titles yet.

"It's fabulous, I love it," yelled Angie, the owner of the salon. "It makes you look so much younger and it brings out your eyes. Good job, Michael." Angie was a cute brunette-sometimes red-head, who resembled the actress Bonnie Franklin from the sitcom *One Day at a Time* but was not the mother type at all even though she treated all her employees like her children.

Angie first started styling my hair when I wrote a cover story on her for the *South Beach Star*. Not that Michael's my stylist, her compliments were less sincere, but I was still in her salon so she'd still get press. That was the name of the game with her, just mention her shop in print and she's happy. Michael on the other hand was a good friend and could care less about press. He also changed his hair color every week, going from red to blue, yellow then white, and back to red again. With that man

color changes he still had his hair, so I knew he'd be the one to take me to white when I was ready. So here I am with white hair and looking fabulous. Well, at least Angie thought so.

"You're going to get so much attention it won't matter what you're wearing," said Michael. I certainly hoped he was right. I wanted some personal attention and not because I put someone's name in my column.

"Wow! Is that really you? Let me get a picture," yelled the photographer Jesse Garcia, as he pulled his camera out of his bag. Jesse was one of the photographers from *Ocean Drive Magazine*, one of the big glossies, and has shot every celebrity that has landed in town. His photos also appeared every Friday in the *Herald* with Tasha Simon's column, so he was in demand and equally pampered. Jesse was a typical photographer type, long stringy hair who underdressed for every occasion.

"And what are you doing here?" I shouted, a little too accusingly.

"I'm here to get my hair trimmed. I know it doesn't look it, but it takes Michael a lot of work to make my hair look like I don't care," Jesse said, in his casual been there, done that kind of way. "So let me be the first to record the transformation. By this time next week, the world will have seen your new look." Was he being serious?

"Only if Michael says I'm camera-ready and we must get Angie in the shot." I hated having my photo taken and I certainly wasn't going to pose for Jesse alone. Even though my face had appeared on the people-pages of so many publications, I was much more comfortable on the other side of the camera.

"Angie, come here for a photo," I yelled. "If everyone hates my hair, I want them to know who to blame." Of course I knew I was only adding points to my merit with her, since undoubtedly the photo would find its way into a future issue of *Ocean Drive Magazine* if not the *Miami Herald*. And I would make sure her salon was mentioned and her name spelled correctly.

"Oh Kidd, you're so sweet. You always remember me," she gushed. Angie quickly ran to the nearest mirror and restyled her hair and added a new coat of lipstick.

"You're my cover girl," I replied. Ever since Angie was on the cover of the *South Beach Star* as one of the fabulous people in my series 'The Fabulous People that make the Fabulous People Look Fabulous' I could do no wrong. Not only did she have the cover framed and displayed in the window of the salon, but she told me I'd never have to pay for services in her salon again. Just another example of what people will do to get their name in print.

"Okay, smile," directed Jesse, while Angie and Michael gave him their biggest smiles, posing on either side of me, who Michael had called a cuter version of Jean Paul Gaultier. Little did I know that the very same moniker would be used to describe my new look and on several occasions I would even be mistaken for Mr. Gaultier himself. Well, I could be mistaken for worse. My life had taken an odd turn from my path as a serious journalist hoping to finish my novel had been sidetracked by a life of pretending to be fabulous and going to celebrity-studded parties. I guess I was on the 'live now, write later' path.

It was air kisses for all, except Michael whose friendship I truly cherished, and he got a big hug before I made my way out the door and back to the *Star* office just steps away across Lincoln Road. The transformation of Lincoln Road, a walking mall of ten blocks or so, running from Washington Avenue to Alton Road, was giving progress a bad name. The Lincoln Road reconstruction plan had begun and the whole Road was being redesigned. Already rents were being raised and the local retailers weren't pleased with the whole scheme. Not long ago Lincoln Road was nearly empty until the artists resurrected the area by renting the storefronts for galleries and the loft spaces on the side streets for studios. The gays claimed it as the perfect cruise street for walking their dogs. Kremlin, a hot dance club, filled the space that was once a Saks department store and other gay-themed shops popped up nearby. Lincoln Road became the crossroads where everyone would meet, if you happened to be awake during daylight hours. Now the 'Road' was getting a major face-lift. With prices going

higher, everyone feared that some of the locals' favorite places like the Hollywood Juice Bar, II Libr or G.W., the Gay Emporium, would be pushed out by rent increases. So far only a few stores ha closed but the retailers on the street had banded together, and complained that if the rent hikes didn finish them off, the loss of business because of the construction certainly would.

The office of the *South Beach Star* was located just off this colorful South Beach thoroughfa which made my life a bit more interesting but more importantly it was very convenient. To kee current on news, drama and up-to-the-minute gossip, I'd just take a quick trip to the Hollywood Juic Bar, a lunch-counter with two sidewalk tables serviced by a waiter on roller blades, who at nigh became Trixie the drag performer. At the Juice Bar, I'd hear all the dirt I hadn't discovered at th salon. Today Lincoln Road was packed with shirtless circuit boys marching almost like a parad proudly displaying their buffed bods that they'd worked all year on. Some even pretended that the were window shopping, as they admired their own reflections while cruising.

"Hey Kidd," yelled Bobby, a hot little rave kid who worked at the Juice Bar. I had met him my fir night in town at local gay bar called TWIST. Bobby had been my welcome party to South Beach an he welcomed me all night long. I think he thought I was a tourist and would never see me again and I was shocked when I reappeared. Bobby and I had become friends after I had moved into th neighborhood and was proud to be my friend since I was the nightlife columnist at the *Star*.

"Hey yourself," I yelled. I was tempted to reveal my new hair color to Bobby but kept my new hai color hidden under my black baseball cap. To Bobby, I still looked like the normal Kidd. I was n ready yet to unveil my new look but the new me was waiting in the wings. Every day I was amazed my new lifestyle, not one a serious novelist might travel, but if nothing else I could call it resear and who knows use it in a novel someday. South Beach had opened its arms to me, quite literally i some cases, and I was ready to revel in my new life.

TWO

Mistaken Identity

Usually the *Star* office was quiet at this time of day so I felt safe coming in so late. The *South Beach Star* was run by Anthony Deerpark, who had traveled the world and made a fortune twice and lost it twice. Anthony was one of the pioneers of South Beach and after several failed business ventures, he had given birth to the *Star*. With the help of his two best friends Jack Daniels (on the rocks) and Johnson Donne (the wealthy ex-socialite whose contributions kept the *Star* in print), along with his caustic tongue, even more biting than Truman Capote's, and his comic charm, Anthony had managed to make the *South Beach Star* the longest running weekly on South Beach. Anthony was for the most part a loveable character with an emphasis on character who was a true performer, especially after a couple of cocktails.

The office was just around the corner from the Hollywood Juice Bar, off Lincoln Road in a loft-like space that once was the studio of the famous, but deceased artist Gregory Moone, known to many as Lady Lola (his drag nom de plume). The small front office consisted of a counter with a desk where the receptionist sat (that happened to be Mindy Morgan's battle station), a layout table and a wall of bookshelves. The back office was a series of desks, usually empty until an hour or two before deadlines and then the place was filled wall to wall with advertising sales reps, columnists, photographers (a term used loosely at the *Star*), and a few *Star* groupies.

All the way in the back (near a door often used for quick exits) stood an antique credenza with packed shelves, which was Anthony's official throne. No chair for him, he worked standing up. When he was tired, he took a very long lunch, or if it was the afternoon he announced that he had a meeting and left for happy hour at LINCOLN, a trendy bar located less than a block away. Of course he never returned until the following morning unless it was Tuesday, press day, and then he returned to approve the layout boards. Sometimes the boards weren't ready for approval until 9 or 10 p.m., but Anthony made the sacrifice and stayed at LINCOLN with his good friend Jack Daniels and an audience that hung on his every word. On Fridays the entire staff followed Anthony to LINCOLN for free cocktails courtesy of an advertising trade with the bar. Anthony held court at the end of the bar but only the newest staff members or advertising reps hoping for a cash advance listened to his stories, the other staff members were there solely for the free booze.

"Well, if it isn't the star of the *Star*," bellowed Mindy Morgan, in her husky English accent as she entered the office. Sitting guard on the front desk so she didn't miss a thing, she was on me like a dog on a bone. "So Mr. Hotshot, who are you taking to the big party tonight?"

"Mindy, you know I always travel alone." Knowing full well she was hinting for an invite and knowing that I'd never ask her, Mindy still attempted to bully me into taking her to the party. She was the first person at the *Star* who gave me any attention but I later discovered she merely took me under her wing so she could smother me immediately if she sensed any competition. As soon as she decided I was lifeless and just a fact-checker with no dreams of glory she totally erased any concern from her calculating mind. Of course, she'd hated me since the day I first started my 'What's Happening' column and swore that she had the idea first. Luckily Anthony stood by me and told her since she had actually never voiced her idea she should never ever mention it again. As the popularity of the column grew, so did her animosity.

While most saw Mindy as a ball-breaking broad, she saw herself as a glamorous journalist/vamp. Both titles lacked credibility, however, if you think Roseanne Barr (the “Roseanne” version) glamorous, you’d love Mindy. If it wasn’t bad enough that she thought every hunk was after her, she later learned, and she made no qualms about hiding the fact, she also liked women. The label ‘rude and obnoxious’ didn’t do her justice, but the poor dear was just another vicious beast clawing her way to the top as aggressively as she could. If anyone dared to call her a vindictive bitch she said, “Fuck ‘em.” Everyone in town knew her and some even attended the events she produced, only so they wouldn’t have to endure her vicious attacks in her column if they didn’t attend. These events often focused on a ridiculous theme like her birthday and those invited who didn’t attend got either a personal screaming session or were blasted in print. Some received both. Mindy Morgan never minced words.

“But tonight you should arrive with someone on your arm,” she whined, pretending that she loved me, forgetting that I didn’t have a memory problem like some.

“And don’t you think everyone else in town has already suggested that?” I replied. “I already called Gina, Madonna’s secretary, and told her I’d be attending alone.” And then I walked quickly back to my desk to avoid any more confrontation. No wonder Anthony leaves every day for happy hour. After just five minutes with Mindy I needed a cocktail. At my desk, I called my service and checked my messages. Celia (my best friend and nightlife side-kick), Sally (*Star* ad rep and nightlife photographer who managed to take out-of-focus photos with an auto-focus camera, but I still loved her), Lester (my dear friend who was also a very talented artist but played the dumb blonde yet was smart enough to stay by my side since he knew the cocktails were always comped), Holly (an ex-beauty queen who acted like she’s still wearing a crown but she’s officially a local gossip columnist who decided to be my friend when she needs an escort for an event), Tasha (that’s Tasha Simon, “Queen of the Night” who ruled South Beach and always looked fabulous for her brief appearances), and Justin (*Star* ad rep who hated me from the day I first walked into the *Star* office and didn’t give me the time of day until my column became one of the selling points of the *Star*). They could all wait until later. Wonder who Justin wants? He never calls me? I took a deep breath and thanked the universe that no one else was around. I’d just grab lots of film from my desk drawer and run out, hopefully without another Mindy attack.

“Hey, what do you think of my hair?” I yelled at Mindy with my hat in my hand as I headed toward the door.

“It’s fabulous, love. I hope every hair on your head falls out, you little twit,” she screamed, without the phony charm she previously tried to feed me, then she stuck out her tongue just to make a point. God, I hope I don’t have nightmares from that image.

“Oh, but do enjoy the party,” she brayed. “Tell Madonna and Tasha I said hello.”

“Sure love, ciao,” I said, as sarcastically as I could before rushing out the door. I needed to pick up my clothes for Sunday’s White Party event. Luckily a cab had just dropped someone off and I jumped in. Imagine if I had taken Mindy to Madonna’s party? I’d have been blacklisted by Madonna, who had said repeatedly that under no circumstances will she be in the same room with Mindy. Mindy was famous for ruining a party and then blackballing the host the following week in print. Somehow Mindy’s column, originally a film review, was transformed into Mindy’s world view and opinion with a little film review at the end if space permitted. Anthony only allowed her column to run because she acted as the *Star* receptionist at no charge.

The traffic on Washington Avenue (the busiest street in South Beach) was horrendous today. Normally I’d be traveling on my bike, which is not only cost effective, but usually faster than a taxi.

My mind was rushing and I mentally checked off my to-do list as I entered Zoo 14, a boutique on Washington Avenue famous for dressing circuit party gods and male go-go boys, both of course.

having the same body types. Maria Consuela, the owner of Zoo 14 and star designer, offered to make my ~~White Party ensemble gratis after her cover story in the *Star*~~ (she's also one of the Fabulous People who make the Fabulous People Look Fabulous) doubled her business for nearly a month plus prompted *Ocean Drive Magazine* to profile her as well. Maria really does make people look fabulous and I hoped she could at least make me look presentable. Versace, who lived a couple of blocks from her shop, fell in love with her and Maria made swimsuits for him and his boyfriend. The circuit goers would have had her custom design their duds from day one when she had a shop in Cherry Grove (that's off Fire Island for those not in the know). Maria designed for those beefy guys who wear their pants so tight they have to lie down to put them on, even if they're made of stretchy fabric, and the shirts are just as tight. The drag queens swarmed around her like she was a goddess and she even taught the diva of all drag queens, Paulina DeSoto, to sew. Maria was considered family to the nightlife crowd and she treated everyone like a star client. Although Maria hid from the limelight, the stars found her and demanded her services, including the likes of Aretha Franklin, Melba Moore, Rod Stewart, Mickie Rourke, and Patti Labelle. She even dressed the boys of the NEW Menudo for one of their videos. Maria rarely went out, but her clothes made the rounds and she was known by every go-go boy on the circuit. Since I didn't have the typical muscular body that she was used to dressing, Maria asked me to come and try on the clothes she had made for me so she could be sure of the fit.

"Kidd's here," Renaldo yelled, as I walked in. Renaldo Perez Gonzalez was the hot Latin stud who managed her store and possessed the body of death, but had the heart of a Sunday school teacher. He was sweet and attentive. I thought if I could only afford him I'd make him mine but Renaldo was loyal to his boyfriend of five years. Actually I had no desire or time for a boyfriend and my heart was still in disrepair from my last emotional devastation.

"Kidd baby, how are you? It's so good to see you," Renaldo gushed, as he gave me a hug and a kiss on each cheek. "What have you done to your hair? Let me see."

"It's a surprise, just a little change," I said meekly as I took off my cap.

"Little change, it's fabulous! So Jean Paul Gaultier," he shrieked. "I love it! Wait till Maria sees it. Come," he said, as he pulled me through the crowded store into the backroom where Maria and two seamstresses were frantically sewing all the orders for White Party. The backroom was wall to wall fabric, clothes and photos of designs worn by muscle boys or drag queens. The two seamstresses were stationed at sewing machines in front while Paulina DeSoto, out of drag, was hand sewing white sequins on jockstraps. Just to see Paulina DeSoto in the daylight out of drag, working on any project that wasn't for her, merited headlines.

"Hey Kidd," said Paulina. "Ready for the big night? Baby, I love your hair." As one of the reigning drag divas on the Beach, Paulina would be at the party. In fact Madonna probably asked Paulina to do a little surprise performance and I bet these costumes were for her back-up dancers. So she was sewing for herself after all.

Maria sat in the back at a sewing machine away from the crowd. Her desk was opposite the sewing machine so she could roll back and forth from sewing machine to desk as she often did.

"Maria, look at Kidd," Renaldo shouted.

Maria looked up from her sewing machine and saw me. Her face lit up like I'd never seen before. "It's incredible," said Maria, as she walked over to me. "Turn around, let me look at you," she commanded.

I turned and realized there was an audience of about a dozen watching. I stood proudly practicing my new persona as the new Kidd. I needed as much practice as I could get since I wasn't comfortable being the center of attention.

"You're a new person," she screamed. "Give me a hug." She hugged and kissed me and then gave me a long look. "You look so much younger and handsomer. It's a look that fits. You look like a star,

she said finally.

~~“Thanks, I like it but I’m not quite used to it yet,” I said, blushing. “Every time I see myself in mirror I can’t believe it’s me.”~~

“Renaldo, do you have Kidd’s clothes?” shouted Maria. “I made special things for you because you’re so good to me and I love you. Now my fashions won’t even be noticed because of your beautiful new hair. Oh well, you deserve to look beautiful. Renaldo, get his things. I’ve got to get back to work. I can’t believe how many designs I’ve yet to construct. I’m so busy, but I can’t complain. Thank god for White Party and Winter Party, otherwise most of my work is for Halloween and the drag queens.”

“Kidd, follow me,” instructed Renaldo.

Maria gave me one more kiss and went back to her sewing machine. “Stop by next week when it’s all over and bring pictures,” said Maria, as she sat down. “I know you’ll be at every party so I won’t miss a thing. Be careful and don’t push yourself and try to have some fun.” Maria was one of the people who seemed to really care.

I followed Renaldo back into the front of the store where a crowd of muscular boys were looking for outfits. “I’ve put your things in the middle dressing room,” said Renaldo. “If you need any help just yell. Here, let me take your backpack.”

I closed the flimsy fabric of the dressing room curtain and changed into the new clothes. White had never been my color; in fact I was known for wearing only black, but I was adhering to the all-white dress code for this party of all parties. I couldn’t believe that Maria made me white alligator pants. They were beautiful and with a matching vest. Oh, but this sheer white t-shirt, I wasn’t so sure, would reveal every pore on my white un-tanned body. Well, we’ll see. When I looked into the mirror I couldn’t believe the image I saw reflected. The pants fit like a glove and actually pushed up my rear giving me a better looking butt. The white, sheer see-thru t-shirt would be a definite no for me with all the circuit bodies around (my body is so un-circuit) but the vest covered my little bulges and somehow magically lifted and separated giving the illusion that I have a chest. Hopefully no one would try to touch or the charade would be over. God, was Maria amazing or what?

“Come out, let me see,” yelled Renaldo.

“It’s okay, it fits. I don’t need to come out,” I shouted.

“But I want to see,” Renaldo demanded.

“Then you come in,” I said, shyly peeking through the curtain. “I’m not going out there with all those gorgeous bodies walking around. They don’t need to wear clothes, I do.” Most of the guys in the shop were parading around half naked. Of course if I had a body like theirs I’d never wear clothes and I’d try on g-strings and skimpy swimsuits in the dressing booths without closing the curtains just like they did.

“Let me see,” ordered Renaldo, as he pushed the curtain aside so he could check the fit. “Turn around, let me see,” he said, as he pulled the vest down and smoothed the pants. “Seems to fit perfectly. Oh la la. Looking good. How does it feel?” I never thought I’d get such a look of approval from Renaldo and it sent chills throughout my body. I’d better not be getting an erection because I was going to have to take these pants off.

“Like a padded bra,” I said, blushing again. “I’m definitely going to have Maria make me more pants, my butt never looked better.” Butts were more important than nightlife columns in some circles.

“It does look nice,” said Renaldo, patting my butt and smiling. I was definitely getting an erection.

“Stop it,” I said. “You know what it really looks like; you measured me for these pants.”

“Oh, but it still looks good,” he said smirking.

“Renaldo, how you flatter me,” I replied, trying to hide the growing bulge in my pants. “Now g

out there and flatter that parade of bubble butts while I change. I've got to get out of here. I have so much to do before the party," I said, even though I knew this was my last errand before I went home. If truth be known, I'd love to have kept him in that changing room with me and undressed him. I glanced at my watch and realized that I had less than two hours before the party started. Shit. I undressed quickly and headed to the counter with my bag of clothes. Renaldo glanced down toward my crotch and smiled. Shit, he had noticed my erection. I was so embarrassed. I had to get out of there.

"Gotta run, Renaldo. Thanks, and tell Maria I love her," I said, as I turned for the door.

"Wait, I've something else for you behind the counter," said Renaldo. "It's something special from Maria. Don't look until you get home."

He pulled another bag from below the counter. Something completely wrapped in black tissue paper was inside with a card on top. I smiled and waved goodbye.

"Hey Kidd, your hair looks fabulous," said Juan Carlos, one of the muscle-bound dancers from Kremlin, a hot gay dance club on Lincoln Road. Oh, the body on that one. He was probably there shopping for a dozen g-strings. As one of the hottest dancers at the club, he probably wore out those g-strings quickly, the way the crowd grabbed for him and stuffed dollar bills down his pouch, as if he needed any help filling it. What a show he'd put on in the dressing booth. He'd take everything off very slowly, and wouldn't close the curtains. A show I'm sorry I had to miss.

I needed to get my mind back on Madonna's party, so out the door I ran. I was already beat and had a full night ahead of me. Thank God my dear friend Celia would have a little treat to pick me up. Yes, my new lifestyle had added some bad habits but weren't writers known for their excesses? How did I ever make it through a night of going out without a bump of coke?

THREE

A Party I'll Never Forget

The cab Renaldo had called was waiting for me at the curb. What a sweetheart. I jumped in with my bags and was glad to be sitting at last. Years ago when I had spent a year in New York and worked as a waiter, the back of a cab became my only safe space between interviews and jobs. Now I cherished the calm before the storm as we traveled to my little second floor studio over El Rancho Grande, a little Mexican restaurant on Pennsylvania Avenue.

My apartment was “drag-queen elegant”—not my description—decorated in leopard print, flea market buys and tossed clothes. My place was merely a closet for outfits given to me by designers and stores that wanted free press and a place to sleep after an exhausting night of hitting as many parties and clubs as possible. I may have led what seemed like a fabulous life, but this South Beach writer could barely pay his bills. My luxury deficient studio featured cracked walls and barely running water, but the price and location couldn't be beat. One block from the *Star* office and a half block from Lincoln Road, my apartment couldn't have been more conveniently located.

The first thing I noticed after entering my apartment was that the light from my answering machine was blinking. Everyone always called me and wanted to talk when I barely had time to spit. It was already seven and Madonna's secretary said they would send a limo to pick me up at eight. I'd arrive around eight-fifteen. Shit. I had just enough time for a shower and a wardrobe check.

I really should call Celia or she'll kill me. We're meeting somewhere after the party. That's if she gets it together. Punctuality is a concept that most South Beach residents don't comprehend and Celia doesn't even understand the word. At least I'm not meeting her at her place. Usually when I meet her at the appointed time, after she has sworn that she's dressed and ready to go, I walk into her apartment to find her naked or nearly naked, and have to watch her change clothes at least a half a dozen times. When she's ready, she's a flawless beauty that turns heads wherever we go, but the process drives me crazy if I have to watch. I love her like a sister but enough about her or I'll never get to the party. Now I have to decide what to wear tonight. Let's see what Maria's surprise could be.

“Oh, my Lord in heaven!” I screamed, as I held up the most beautiful leopard shirt I've ever seen made from some silk-like fabric. Why it is silk, how stupid of me. Maria knows me so well. She knows my whole apartment is decorated in leopard including the bedspread, my curtains, and the chairs. There's even leopard fabric artfully placed on tables. I say artfully, someone else might say carefully arranged to hide the scratches and stains. All designed with leopard fabric that came from Maria's studio. Now, I know what I'll be wearing to Madonna's party.

Just as I stepped into the shower the phone rang. Of course, it was Celia. “Kidd, pick up, I know you're there. It's me,” yelled Celia. “You better not be avoiding me, I know you're there,” she snapped.

Dripping wet from the shower, I ran for the phone nearly tripping over the shoes I had just taken off. “Shit. Hello, hello, Celia.” She had hung up. If she knew I was here she should have stayed on the line a bit longer. I'll call her when I'm dressed, otherwise I won't get dressed at all. I jumped back into the shower and the phone rang again. Yes, it was Celia.

“Kidd pick up, I know you're there,” she whined. “I talked to Renaldo and he said you had just left the shop. Where else could you be? You've got to be there. You shithead, you better call me. Love

you. Oh, if I don't talk to you before the party, but you better call me, asshole, I'll meet you at the Delano for drinks and then we'll go to Liquid. I'm bringing a new friend along named Tina. You love her. You better not stand me up. Love you. Heard about your hair, can't believe you didn't tell me about it. Asshole. Renaldo says it"....beep.

Thank god for answering machines with a time limit. Celia usually called back and back until she had said everything on her mind, which amazingly was a lot. Once she called back eleven times just so she could tell me the whole story of her incredibly awful day, the result of not being able to find the perfect dress for an event. Of course, she had to spit out the entire story again when we met for drinks later because she knew that I hadn't listened to the story on my machine. That was my Celia.

I'll never forget the night I met Celia at SWIRL, one of the coolest bar/hangouts on Washington Avenue that featured a bar full of toys and stools filled with more drug dealers than regular customers. SWIRL was so outrageously illegal, and I say that in the nicest way, I usually made it my last stop of the night. One night I turned around and Celia was just standing there staring at me. I thought she was a pre-op transsexual with flawlessly perfect makeup that looked like it was airbrushed on with a pair of incredible tits on display. How she loved to show them off. Once she even tried to convince me they were real, forgetting that she had told me the whole story of her operation and even told me the name of her plastic surgeon. Celia was just like Marilyn Monroe's character in "All About Eve" except that Celia was a brunette. She was a walking sex machine who wore her heart on her sleeve. Her heart happened to be gold, but hollow. Her only talent, besides looking fabulous and not accepting a "no" from anyone, was makeup. She could make anyone look beautiful. She was a complete mess and sometimes I thought her only purpose in life was to screw up mine. Somehow I fell head over heels for her. Celia also fell for me and wanted me to physically prove it. Unfortunately, for her, I gave up having sex with women years before we met. Celia loved sex, drugs and gay men who couldn't give her the physical love she needed, so they gave her clothes, jewelry and drugs. Like a character out of a novel, Celia was my Sally Bowles with a little Holly Golightly thrown in.

Sometimes I fantasized that if I had been straight, Celia and I would be incredible together. Thank God, that thought quickly passed. We had fantastic adventures together and she was the perfect accessory and photographer magnet. Not that I wanted my photo taken but she seemed to crave the light from a camera's flash. If her beautiful designer ensembles didn't have the photographers all over us, she walked up to them and with her sexy Marilyn Monroe voice asked them to take a photo of her and her friend. They never said no. She was one of those people who never really worked, knew everyone and never wore the same outfit twice. Celia even looked fabulous when she was too drugged or drunk to walk.

There goes the phone again. I'd better get my butt in gear or I won't be ready when the limo arrives.

"Kidd, hello, it's Tasha. If you haven't left for the party yet, please give me a call. I'm just finishing my column and I just got a tip of a sighting of Jean Paul Gaultier, but I need to verify it. Call me. Thanks." That said a lot for my placement in town, when Tasha Simon called me for confirmation of a celebrity sighting.

Clean, all towed off and smelling of, can you believe it, Jean Paul Gaultier's cologne Le Male which was a birthday gift from my friend Lester, I put on my black velvet pants and new leopard shirt with a Versace belt. All gifts, thank you. I could never have afforded even the pants on my *Star* salary and the belt, don't even ask. One look in the mirror and I still didn't believe it was me. Yes, very Jean Paul Gaultier, but better looking. I think I just had a vain South Beach moment.

When I first arrived in town nearly a year ago, I was a big nobody without a job and I knew no one. Now, not only do I get invited to every party, but I'm friends, okay casual acquaintances, with most of the celebrities that I write about. Why me? I guess I know what to write and don't take the scene too

seriously and only show them in a favorable light. Go figure. I always ask before I take a photo, unlike the ~~strolling paparazzi photographers that have begun stalking South Beach~~. I'd never publish a photo of someone looking bad and often I'll call and ask if they're still speaking to the person who's in the photo with them. If they don't want the photo printed I pull it and if they don't remember the person or the night then I definitely pull the photo. Deeds like that get me invited as a guest to parties where the paparazzi have to wait outside. Of course none of the tabloids would ever hire me, which is a fact that I'll always be proud of. I still feel that I've sold myself out, writing fluff and shooting paparazzi photos. Someday I'll get back to writing that novel.

Often the paparazzi took my photo with some of the celebrities and if it was a slow week they'd take my photo with whomever I'm with. In the last couple of months my photo had appeared in almost every local glossy, Tasha's column in the *Herald* and even in a couple of national publications like *People* and *US Weekly*. My friends and the staff of the *South Beach Star* kid me that I've become a local celebrity, whatever that means. I shudder at the thought because I know a few so-called "local celebrities" and I certainly hope I don't act like they do. One of them, one who will remain nameless, has "local celebrity" printed on his business card and this character tries to work his "celebrity" for as much as it's worth. He may be a local celebrity but he wasn't invited to the party tonight. For Madonna's party, the paparazzi would be waiting with baited breath all over town because they know that Madonna, Mickey Rourke, Antonio Sabato Jr., Patti LaBelle, Calvin Klein, Barry Diller, David Geffen, Versace and his sister Donatella, as well as a long list of other celebrities would be in town. Every club on the Beach swore that the stars would be in attendance but the best parties would be held in private homes of celebrities like Madonna, Gloria Estefan, Ricky Martin and Sylvester Stallone. And I was invited to the hottest party of the year. Shit, the limo would be here in ten minutes.

"Celia, Kidd here. Don't talk, just listen. I'm being picked up in two minutes. I'll meet you at the Delano at midnight. Love you. How dare you call me an asshole. You shithead. Love you. Bye."

She hates it when I do that, but knows when I say don't talk, just listen, I really mean business, but it only works on the phone. When we're together I can barely finish a sentence before she butts in. Hopefully I have time to return Tasha's call.

"Tasha, Kidd here."

"Kidd, thanks for calling me back. I'm just finishing my column and just got a tip and I knew that you'd know if it was true. Someone called me and told me Jean Paul Gaultier is in town and was just seen at Zoo 14. My celebrity service never mentioned he would be in town and I was shocked to hear he was at Zoo 14. Why would Gaultier be there?" She was smart not to believe everything she heard.

"I can't believe it," I said, between laughs. "It's happening already."

"What do you mean?" asked Tasha.

"When did you get the call?" I asked, still laughing.

"Just about an hour ago, they said they saw Gaultier leave the shop carrying two Zoo 14 bags. I find it totally implausible that he would be shopping at Zoo 14," she added. Tasha had a biting tongue that she hid from her public.

"It wasn't him," I said, trying to compose myself. I couldn't believe this was happening. "Tasha, it was me. I dyed my hair white today for White Party. Everyone says I remind them of Jean Paul Gaultier, but I look fabulous, or at least I've been told I do. Wait till you see me tonight, I look like an entirely different person. That was me walking out of Zoo 14 with two bags." I paused and waited for Tasha to speak. She was speechless which was so rare. "Didn't Jesse tell you about my hair?" I added, waiting for a response. "He was at the salon and took my photo just after I went blond. I didn't tell anyone so it would be a big surprise."

"I can't believe Jesse kept that from me," Tasha screeched. "I just got off the phone with him and even mentioned the Jean Paul Gaultier sighting and he didn't say a thing. He's crazed with celebri-

madness and was rambling on in Spanish about not being invited to Madonna's party. Security will be very heavy and photographers won't be able to get anywhere near the house."

"That's great. That'll make them even more frenetic on the Beach trying to get shots of the star. We're going to have an incredible time. If you need any photos I'll have my little Minolta with me," said, smugly. I couldn't believe how excited I felt.

"I guess I'd better carry my little camera with me too," Tasha replied. "I can't wait to see your hair. You're going to get so much attention and you're already making everyone crazy looking for Jean Paul Gaultier. And what are you wearing tonight?" she teasingly asked.

"Just a little something that Maria made me," I said, proudly. "You'll see. Madonna won't be the only blonde at her party tonight. Gotta go, the limo is here. See you at the party. I know you'll be dressed to the nines. Look for a Jean Paul Gaultier type with a camera. We'll gossip. Bye."

I hung up and took one last quick look in the mirror. I couldn't believe that was really me. I locked the door to Kidd Manor and rushed downstairs hoping that the limo would still be waiting. Out from on the steps was the regular gang of hot Cuban guys that lived in the building. They threw me a look and didn't even recognize me until they saw my camera.

"It's Kidd. Hey papi, you look good tonight," one of them yelled. "You come back home to me early tonight."

Yeah, right. Someday I'll get the nerve and turn around and confront them and say, "Why wait till later, why not now?" That would have to be the day that I moved out of the building since I didn't have the balls to be so bold.

Thank God, the limo was waiting. The driver opened the door for me and the Cuban guys all whistled. I jumped inside and the door shut the whistles and the rest of the world out. Madonna's voice sang softly on the limo's stereo system, thanks to a very details-oriented secretary. The seats were plush, the temperature controlled and an ice bucket with an open bottle of champagne sat waiting on the console.

"The champagne's for you Kidd," said the driver on his intercom. It's like he was reading my mind. I'd better be careful what I think. Madonna would be the one to hire drivers that could read minds, not so much for the service but so she could find out exactly what her guests really thought about her. What a luxury. I could live in this limo. "There's a note for you next to the ice bucket," announced the driver, just as I spotted the envelope. How scary. Gina, Madonna's secretary, knew how to make everyone feel special. Inside was a note that read, "A toast to you. Tonight will be a grand celebration. I can't wait to see your new hair." Signed "M." Wow, that's so sweet but also very scary. How did she find out about my hair?

I looked down and saw that there's a little baggie of what looked like coke on the floor. I don't know who left it there but I certainly could use a little pick-up. I had done bumps of coke with Celia but this was the first time I'd had a whole little baggie to myself. Celia usually just stuffed it up my nose with her fingernail. I guess I could do a little bump or two before I get to the party. My God, I was drinking champagne and doing coke in the back of a limo headed to a private party at Madonna's house. Someone pinch me. I really felt great and suddenly wasn't feeling tired at all. No wonder cocaine was illegal?

what's HAPPENING?

ramblings on South Beach nightlife

by KIDD

ROMANCE AT KREMLIN: It was a night to fall in love...and I did, several times. **KREMLIN**, the fabulous Lincoln Road gay club known for its hot-hot male dancers, was decked out with a romantic celluloid theme and filled with lots of men ready to be romantic. **DJ David Knapp** kept the music pumping for the shirtless dancing men who were already pumped. The "if I was any closer I'd be on the other side of you crowd" included legendary South Beach icon **Louis Canales**, actor **Rupert Everett**, designer **George Tamsitt**, the fabulous drag divas **Adora** (no one has bigger hair), **Taffy Lynn**, & **Damien Devine** (no one has bigger lips), **Peter Estrada** (Kremlin's owner), photographer **Jose Antonio**, designer **Calvin Klein** (with an entourage of pretty boys), makeup legend **Kevyn Aucoin**, socialite **Curtis DeWitz**, **Nikki Haskell** (diet queen to the stars), artist **Aaron Von Powell**, photographer **Dimitri**, and **Rubio & Kidd Madonny** (doing an obscene dance under a white veil in the upstairs performance area).

WHITE PARTY UPDATE: Everyone's talking about the Saturday night event for **White Party Week** at **First Union Plaza** in downtown Miami which features the incredible sounds of **DJ Mark Tarbox** in an ultramodern 15-story open atrium. Shopping for White Party Week fashions has been like an Olympic Event in South Beach. With so many added events and a multitude of private parties a whole new wardrobe is necessary. **ETE** (the popular Lincoln Road boutique for the fashionably dressed male) has just reopened in a new location across from the **Lincoln Theatre** (just in time for White Party). **Zoo 14** seems to be able to fulfill the most unusual custom order, be it a white g-string for one or white sailor suits for twenty. **Marla** at **Zoo 14** has her hands full with all the orders and who knows how many assistants are helping her sew for those circuit boys.

WHO'S THAT GIRL: Everyone is talking about **Madonna's** party. The material girl is upstaging the **White Party** buzz (even though it doesn't conflict) by throwing an A-List invitation only party at her house. Guess who is invited? Yes, I'm one of maybe two journalists on the list, so you can read about it here next week. Photos next week.

SEEN SHOPPING FOR WHITE PARTY: **Egon Von Furstenburg** (at **ETE**), **Rupert Everett**, **Kevin Crawford**, and **Joe Bon** (at **Zoo 14**).

EVENT OF THE WEEK: **Back Door Bamby** opens at **KBG** this Thursday night with hot promoter **Mykel Stevens** (now sporting a shaved head) at the helm. His new feisty sidekick is the fabulous artist **Attila Lakatoush** (which team does he really play for?) who has promised us a series of exciting Thursdays. Can you say **Debbie Harry** with a whip? Have you ever experienced public bondage with an open-bar? Do you enjoy watching drag queens mud-wrestling while lip-syncing to **Madonna**? It'll be another night of beautiful people (they pose and smile while the rest of us talk about them) with assorted hipsters and maybe a few drug dealers.. Entrance to **Back Door Bamby** is not in the back.

TREND OF THE MOMENT: Sex instead of a resume.

BARTENDER OF THE WEEK: **Dotty** (formerly of **West End**) is now at **LINCOLN**. There may not be any hot go-go boys at **LINCOLN** but there you don't have to watch your wallet. Need to relax? **Dotty** is also an incredible masseuse if her cocktails don't do the trick.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: I wouldn't mind meeting a Cuban Drug Lord.

NEXT WEEK: If you see someone dressed in all black with short bleached hair and a camera, it's probably me. As always, buy me a cocktail (or three) and share some juicy dirt. Until next week, see you out.

A YEAR EARLIER

1996

FOUR

Becoming A Star

I wanted to die! Never in my life had I felt like ending my life, but suddenly I was quickly weighing the options in my mind as I lay in bed hoping that God would do the dirty work for me. Always the eternal optimist, I had never encountered a situation that had pushed me to the edge that my life was standing on at that very moment. I wanted to jump off the cliff of life but found myself flat on my back barely able to move from my bed.

Last night I had arrived in South Beach, a total new world compared to my home in Virginia searching for a new life. After lying awake in my bed, I came to the conclusion that there were only two solutions to get rid of my misery, start a new life or kill myself so I quickly got up and packed my car. I'm not the suicide type so I decided to drive as far away from my troubles as possible. It wasn't just that I needed to start a new life, I had to discover a reason for living.

On the surface it seemed that success and happiness had come my way. The arts magazine that I had started a couple of years ago had flourished and I was happily involved in a relationship with my business partner. There was one drawback to that relationship. It was totally secret. No one knew of our involvement since he publicly pretended to be straight. The normal person might have seen the trouble in such a relationship but I wasn't that person. I'm basically a private person and thought I had struck pay dirt when I found someone who wanted to keep our relationship private *and* wished to live in his own apartment. I didn't even get jealous when he dated girls as I stupidly thought it was just a cover. How could I have been so blind?

One morning I went into the office and discovered a note taped on the computer screen that simply said that he had left. The fucker didn't just leave with my heart, but he had emptied out the business account, stolen my spare camera (the old Nikon that I used when I first fell in love with photography) and left town with my favorite jacket (a black cashmere Ralph Lauren suit jacket). This man, I still couldn't bring myself to say his name, had ruined me financially but had also wrecked me emotionally. The saddest part was that I could turn to no one for solace. There was not one single person, absolutely no one, who knew of this relationship. Certainly anyone that I mentioned it to would think me crazy since there had not been a clue of our secret relationship. We were that clever and I was that stupid. I didn't want to talk about it anyway, I just wanted to die.

For days I prayed to God, hoping He'd strike me dead as I didn't have the courage to kill myself. Suicide had never been an option for me, even when faced with such misery and pain that the only solution was death. The checks written on the business account were already bouncing, and payrol, rent and thousands of dollars worth of other bills needed attention. I was broke but wasn't able to deal with the financial disaster because I was wallowing in the misery of losing a lover. Every day the avalanche of problems worsened and I just couldn't cope. I escaped to the comfort of my bed and didn't answer the phone or the door. The idea that my only two choices were suicide or escape scared the hell out of me. While I felt like all the life had been drained from my body, I wasn't a quitter and really didn't want to die. I had too much living to do yet and still had a novel to write. There had to be

some place that I could start over without looking back, a place where people didn't ask questions. Miami Beach was the first place that came to mind.

It took three days of trips to the ATM to empty my bank account. Luckily, I had kept my personal account separate and secure. I packed my car with provisions for a new life, my camera, my favorite art pieces, clothes for every occasion and my photo negatives. Every picture that I took from the wall was replaced with another and rearranged my apartment to look like nothing was missing. If I was to vanish it had to look as if I had disappeared in thin air and I would tell no one. My empty bank account would be a major clue to anyone investigating that my disappearance had been planned but my destination was to be a mystery. My plan was to disappear without a trace.

Anyone wondering about my whereabouts would never have guessed that I was sitting in a South Beach bar called LINCOLN, a bar named after its location on a walking mall called Lincoln Road. I could barely believe I was sitting in South Beach myself, waiting for Anthony Deerpark, the editor and publisher of *South Beach Star*, the man who was going to be my ticket to a new life. The desertion of my former life had not solved my emotional state as I still wallowed in depression and lacked a motivation to write or pick up my camera until I picked up a publication called the *South Beach Star*, a publication that reminded me of the one that had been my life in Virginia. *South Beach Star* was a tabloid with irreverent style that followed no rules, including punctuation or spelling, publishing the news, dish and dirt of South Beach weekly. As if sent by a messenger from heaven, this tabloid was left by the person sitting next to me at the counter of the Art Deco diner where I was having breakfast. I grabbed it and started thumbing through the pages. It reminded me so much of my paper in the early stages. While I had hoped I might work on my novel that I had started a couple years ago, I had a strange feeling about this paper.

The *South Beach Star* seemed to need assistance and being needed had always been an inspiration and driving force in my choices. The feeling that I wasn't needed or even wanted seemed to be my downfall and at the moment I certainly didn't feel either. I could not shake the sensation of being totally alone and unwanted in a town that was swarming with strangers. I had never experienced such a feeling of doom and numbness where for a moment I actually thought death was my only solution. Luckily, I had thrown out that choice but now I needed to find my spark again, a reason to live, and I wasn't going to find it by sitting around doing nothing.

Two years previously, I had visited South Beach with a DJ friend who had been hired to spin at a new club. We walked the streets of South Beach after his gig and looked in the windows of the art galleries and boutiques that populated a run-down street named Lincoln Road. South Beach seemed like a place where anyone could be who they wanted to be and I always wanted to see if that was true. I had heard that Miami had a rapidly growing nightlife scene and had become a popular location for fashion shoots. I was hoping that Miami might have a place for me.

Sitting alone at a table in this trendy South Beach bar, I waited for Anthony Deerpark to bring me back cocktails. I could barely believe that I was sitting in a strange bar with Mr. Deerpark and surprised by all surprises, I was having a cocktail. In the afternoon, no less. After three failed attempts to meet this man in the *South Beach Star* office, where I had left my resume three different times, I decided I needed to be a little more aggressive. The chubby English girl at the front desk seemed friendly enough when I left my resume with her. The blond guy, who said he was the art director, was more than polite and even seemed to be flirting with me when I left a resume with him. The handsome fellow, who looked like a model but told me he was head of advertising, said, "I'll make sure that Mr. Deerpark gets your resume," when I left my third resume with him. Little did I know that none of those documents would ever reach the intended destination.

So, after not hearing a word, yes or no, no or yes, I decided to try to get to the boss myself. I gathered up my courage and marched right into the *South Beach Star* office, and luckily enough, I

one was there. Well, not in the front office anyway.

“Who’s there?” screamed a voice from the back office. It just happened to be the voice of Anthony Deerpark, who for some reason took an immediate liking to me after I showed him my resume, a copy of my magazine, and volunteered my services. At the time, I didn’t need money. I needed a reason to live. He quickly grabbed me by the arm and led to this bar located just around the corner from the *Star* office, where he said he conducted all his meetings.

Although it was just after 4 p.m., the bar seemed quite active. A time only drunks or losers were found in bars in Virginia, or so I thought. Here, gorgeous men rushed back and forth setting the bar up for the busy evening that they apparently anticipated. LINCOLN was designed to the max, all modern lines and high tech accessories mixed with savvy and flair. Miniature lights hung on suspended wires and appeared to be spaced haphazardly but were not, since each fixture lit either a piece of art on the wall or one of the many art pieces exhibited on the shelves behind the bar. A giant light fixture that resembled a paper canoe with water wings hung over the bar. The bar stools were black metal each with a bright red vinyl seat. Sheer black fabric covered the front windows that looked out on the busy activity of Lincoln Road, enabling customers to see out, while the outside world could not see in. Four tall black steel tables lined the wall opposite the bar, each with matching stools like those at the bar.

“Here we go,” said Mr. Deerpark, as he set our drinks down on the table. Mine a vodka and cranberry. “Now, that’s so much better than bottled water,” he said, commenting on my first choice of beverage which he would not allow. “I don’t like to drink alone, even though I always drink with my best friend, Jack Daniels,” he said, with a mischievous grin. “Now tell me, what was your name again?”

“My name is Jamie Kidd. I left three resumes with your staff hoping that you might call,” I said quite timidly, but gained more courage with each sip of my cocktail.

“Apparently my trusted staff chose to keep you and your resume from me, since they think they’re the only staff I need,” said Deerpark, with another of his grins. This time there was a bit more mischief and what seemed like a look of pleasure on his face. “So tell me, my dear boy. What is it that you do?”

I took a deep breath and told him the story of my life, of course listing my credentials, my writing background, my credits as a photographer, how I happened to get into the publishing business in California, and how I finally landed in Virginia writing for an arts publication that I had started. For the next hour, with the help of cocktails which never stopped coming, I shared my love of the business and told him how I couldn’t get a writing job in Virginia so I had started my own publication, where I basically did everything from selling advertising, to paste-up and promotion, including most of the writing and all of the photography. I shared the details of how I transformed a small town publication into a statewide monthly in less than three years. While arts publications never turn much of a profit, we were paying the bills and landing more advertising accounts every month. Unfortunately I had a partner who had emptied the company bank account before he left town. I didn’t mention that he had also stolen my heart as well.

The cocktails slowly transformed the timid Jamie into the eager journalist who saw a place for himself at the *South Beach Star*. Anthony Deerpark listened to each word as if he had been waiting for their delivery while he sipped his drink. I would soon learn that this was a rare and historical moment as Anthony Deerpark never listened, without butting in, or made offers where money was involved. Anthony saw this as an opportunity for both of us, one for me to start over and one for him to get back at his staff.

“And why have you landed here, my dear boy?” inquired Anthony, which he demanded I call him as he couldn’t stand being called Mr. Deerpark.

“Well, that’s a very long story,” I said slowly. I took a deep breath and looked in Anthony’s eyes.

before letting the words escape from my mouth. "I had to flee while I could, otherwise I would be stuck there the rest of my life. If I had stayed, I know I probably would have killed myself or but I left because I really felt dead already. I'm not suicidal so I had to escape." I was trying to make light of the fact that a publication that I had started and given me life to for years had been crumbled so quickly by one man. Being a private person, I chose to keep my heartbreak and emotional distress a secret. I just wanted a job as a writer or photographer and didn't need to share my emotional baggage. I had hopes of saving enough money so I could take time off to write that novel I had been formulating in my mind for the past couple of years, but I was having trouble putting words to paper.

"Well, let's have another cocktail," said Anthony, as he quickly grabbed our glasses and went over to the bar. I had been totally wrapped up in telling my story and had not noticed that the bar had begun to fill with people. The mood had completely changed as the sun had set and now the bar was covered with tiny votive candles that complimented the light hanging from the ceiling making the place appear a bit magical. The voice of Peggy Lee sang 'Is That All There Is' and I thought "how apropos." I realized that my life wasn't over and I wasn't about to accept defeat. I was ready for a new life and I thought I had found it. That wasn't all there was, I wanted more.

"Here we go," announced Anthony, as he brought us fresh cocktails. The actual number of cocktails that I had consumed while sitting with Anthony was a mystery and for some odd reason I didn't feel inebriated but energized. "My dear boy, my staff tried to keep you from me but they have a little surprise in store for them. What a gem you are and with all that experience, well let's just say, you could be an asset to my publication. Why, I think you're just the person that I've been searching for to be my assistant. Consider yourself hired and you started working for me an hour ago. LINCOLN is my other office. All late afternoon and early evening business is usually discussed at the end of the bar. This bar is the meeting place for all great minds. There's the owner, let me introduce you. Paul, come here a minute," shouted Anthony.

"Anthony darling, how are you?" said a little balding man with a big cherubic smile that looked almost like it was pasted on. "I noticed you earlier but I never interrupt meetings of the mind." The man was Paul Reed, one of the owners of LINCOLN, who had also designed the bar. Paul had bought the place on a whim because he said he needed his own bar where he could feel comfortable. Paul and his partner happened to be among the most sought after designers in Miami, to say nothing of being two of the most successful. LINCOLN had become Paul's little toy and the watering hole of the local hip and trendy of South Beach.

"Paul, you must meet Jamie Kidd, my new assistant," barked Anthony, who then motioned to me as if I were some prize in a game show.

"Congratulations. I'm Paul, one of the owners of this humble little establishment," said Paul, as he clinked his cocktail to mine. "I hereby welcome you to the family. I'll have to take you to lunch so you can find out all about you without Anthony cutting in, besides I've heard all his stories and he's heard all of mine. I have to rush off now to change into something a bit more fabulous but I'll be back later. We're having a special party for all the volunteers from Winter Party, but you're both welcome. Later I was to discover that Winter Party was an annual fundraising event primarily attended by gay men who traveled from all parts of the world to attend. It was a circuit party and I had yet to discover what a wonderful thing a circuit party could be. I thought it funny that it was called Winter Party. It was indeed winter and cold in New York, where the majority of the men came from, but in Miami it was warm and beautiful.

"Oh no," said Anthony immediately. "Tonight I'm going to show Jamie the town, we'll be back tomorrow. Toodles." And with that said, Anthony grabbed me and led me out the door. We rushed down Lincoln Road with Anthony waving and greeting almost everyone that we passed. He either knew everyone or acted like he did. Rushing towards a waiting taxi on a street that crossed Lincoln

Road, Anthony opened the door and jumped in pulling me in behind him.

~~“Driver, next stop TWIST,”~~ shouted Anthony, with the flourish of a practiced train conductor who was indeed announcing the next stop. As the cab sped along, Anthony looked at me and smiled. “Remember,” he said, seriously as if making a point. “Your job is to remember because sometimes you forget. My good boy, I have an incredible memory but sometimes the alcohol wipes away portions of the night and sometimes even warps my recollections. I do hope you have a good memory because a very important part of your job is to remember. Welcome to South Beach, hold on, the taxi ride can be a bit bumpy.”

Little did I know I was about to take the ride of my life and yes, it would get more than a bit bumpy.

FIVE

Easy Come, Easy Go

My life had purpose once again and soon I'd be writing about the glamorous and famous people who live and visit South Beach. Or would I? This was to be my first day on the job as the assistant to Anthony Deerpark, editor and publisher of the *South Beach Star*, who himself was one of the pioneers of South Beach. The *Star*, as it was called by locals and those in the know, chronicled the South Beach nightlife scene and interviewed local celebrities while Anthony's coverage was the political waterfront. In fact, sometime during the previous night's excursion someone had mentioned that Anthony had even run for mayor, but as a joke. Could he really have done that?

When Mr. Deerpark had hired me yesterday he had not exactly told me what my duties would be as his assistant. I guess I'd find out soon enough. He had just said that my job was to remember. Anthony had stated that he always came into the office at 9 a.m. but I didn't have to come in until 11 a.m. He told me that I would need my rest after a night of celebrating and I believe he had said that he wanted to make sure his entire staff was there when I walked in the door. That frightened me a bit, but promptly at 11 a.m., I stood in the open door of the *South Beach Star* office ready to begin my first day of work.

"It's by invitation only and you are all invited but you each must bring a friend," announced a loud female voice with a strange English accent as I walked in the door. It sounded like that chubby English girl, who had first taken my resume but I couldn't see her since the desk by the door was surrounded by handsome young men. If I wasn't positive that this was the office of the *South Beach Star* I would have thought I was walking into a model casting. For a moment, I was afraid to enter since I wasn't nearly as attractive as any of these guys and imagined that I might be turned away.

"Excuse me," I said, timidly, but loud enough to get someone's attention.

"Hello and who are you?" yelled the chubby English girl and the men scattered.

"My name is Jamie Kidd," I said politely while gazing at two fierce eyes staring at me like I was bad news. This rather buxom woman was the source of that harsh-accented voice that I'd first heard. I immediately assumed that it had to be her position at the *Star* that attracted these men to her, since her looks, charm and personality eluded her, judging from her greeting. Usually I wasn't so quick to judge a person; however this woman seemed to play all her bad cards up front.

"Here, take an invitation to my Oscar party," she demanded, without adding any charm to her voice. "I'm Mindy Morgan and I'm hosting the party. You can bring a guest but the dress is formal," she snorted. She looked me up and down as if I was being inspected for final approval. "Do you have a tux?" she asked, spitting the words in disdain, ready for my negative reply.

"Yes, I have a tux and tails," I proudly replied. "How dressy is this affair?" Runaway that I was, I'd arrived in town with a wardrobe suitable for any occasion, or so I had thought.

"Tux and tails," she sneered. "My, I like that in a man," she said, adding a bit of friendliness to her tone, however I felt as if she were talking about ingredients in a tasty dish and if it suited her she would have me for lunch. "And what do you do?" she finally asked.

"I'm a writer and I'm supposed to start working here today," I announced. "Mr. Deerpark hired me as his assistant. Is he here?"

"He hired you as his what?" came the reply in shriek form. The words that I had spoken were

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