

Author: Ward Rangler

Work: Fiction

Title: Sleeper Cell



## High-level outline

### Chapter 1 – Shelter in the Storm

- Chas McKinney arrives with nothing except three shopping bags clutched in his hands.<sup>1</sup>
- The outer bands of a hurricane have begun to lash the area.
- Chas discovers a gap in the fence surrounding the Palmtree resort and slips through.
- A coiled rattlesnake blocks one of the doorways, forcing him to find another entry.
- As the storm intensifies, Chas repeatedly kicks at unyielding doors.
- He hurls a barbecue grill through a window, then cuts himself while climbing through the shattered glass.

### Chapter 2 – Unwelcoming Committee

- Zito Ramirez, now an indicted embezzler and formerly the VP of Food and Beverage at the timeshare resort, confronts Chas and aggressively tells him to leave.
- Just as Chas pleads for shelter through the storm, Horace Smith arrives. Horace is smaller and younger than Zito, but to Chas's surprise, he disarms Zito's aggression simply by asking a few leading questions.<sup>2</sup>
- Horace comments about the blood on the carpet and assures Zito that Chas should stay, noting his injury and harmless appearance. Zito leaves, mumbling a veiled warning.

### Chapter 3 – Orientation with Horace

- Horace, a former EMT, treats Chas's wound with practiced care.

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1 The shopping bags add a touch of mystery and emotion. The reader will wonder what belongings Chas salvaged to bring with him.

2 Consider clarifying what Horace asks. His question could imply that if police saw Chas wandering the streets with shopping bags, they might pick him up and want to know where he's been.

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- He shares details about his past work, including his time at the Adventure Worlds theme park.
- While giving Chas a property tour, Horace introduces him to other residents: Deidra Patel and her younger sister Morgan, and Floyd Lincoln.
- Everyone at Palmtree except Zito and Morgan has worked at the park, creating a sense of insider camaraderie.<sup>3</sup>
- As the storm passes, the group inspects the damage in the room where Chas had broken in and helps him settle into a nearby room.
- Horace assures Chas that Zito can be ignored. They are protecting his secret past, so he can only pretend to have influence.

#### **Chapter 4 – Unpacking**

- Chas and Deidra’s mutual attraction electrifies Chas. Morgan, the young teenager, makes a sly reference to it that triggers her big sister’s rebuke.
- Horace more tactfully says that two people are plenty to accomplish unpacking. All but Deidra depart.
- Deidra helps Chas settle in. The two shyly maintain distance, which hints at future romance.
- Chas and Deidra share memories of working at Adventure Worlds. Their interest in each other is palpable, as is their pride in having been on the Adventure Worlds team.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Chapter 5 – Maintenance**

- Horace and Chas repair and refuel the resort’s generator.
- Horace notes that the gasoline supply is stored below ground and should last another year. Hurricanes and power outages could happen at any time at Palmtree.

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<sup>3</sup> This shared history builds a strong sense of community and backstory.

<sup>4</sup> Yes! This deepens the bond and reinforces the shared identity of your ensemble cast.

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- When the repair is complete, Horace asks if Chas would be willing to help with another project. Dwindling food and medical supplies pose a more immediate threat.

## Chapter 6 – Foraging

- Horace assigns Chas to forage for food in the Fan Palm Village of Palmtree. He hands Deidra a master key and tells her to help him.
- Morgan and Horace will forage the Cane Palm Village. Floyd is away. Morgan explains that Floyd does that—he leaves and sometimes is away for weeks.
- As they complete their foraging of several timeshare units, they leave some supplies and food in Chas’s room.
- As Morgan departs, again shyly, Chas asks her to let him know if she finds scissors anywhere. He wants to give himself a haircut.

## Chapter 7 – Haircut

- The next morning, Chas awakes to a gentle tap at the door. He quickly dresses.
- Deidra hands him scissors, but without entering the room. They have a brief conversation after which she asks how he trims the back of his head.
- Chas grins boyishly and demonstrates how he twists around at the mirror.
- Deidra steps in and tells him she will take care of that part. She does, and shares her concern about Morgan and Zito.
- Then she offers to trim Chas’s beard. They get closer and closer, leading to a first kiss.<sup>5</sup>
- A clanging of pots and pans outside signals that a community meal is about to be served.<sup>6</sup> That breaks the emotional tension between Chas and Deidra as they head to the resort’s main restaurant, Marlin Bay.

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<sup>5</sup> As the emotional and physical intimacy builds naturally, that will bring readers further into the story,

<sup>6</sup> Depending on the size of the Palmtree Resort complex, clanging pots and pans might attract unwanted outside attention. If so, you might instead have Morgan intrude in the scene to announce lunch. Deidra would express relief and ask Morgan where she has been, and with whom.

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## Chapter 8 – Mission Assignment

- It's now Florida winter, with yellow pollen on the sidewalks, not white snow.<sup>7</sup>
- Horace instructs Chas and Deidra that it's time for them to find some fresh produce, as they have done in recent weeks. He suggests going to a market in Crane County.
- When Deidra protests, Horace reminds them that too much produce disappearing from one local area could attract police attention.
- Morgan suggests that Zito might let them use his SUV. Horace is surprised, but Morgan insists that Zito has a "monster SUV."
- Horace expresses surprise.
- Deidra says they shouldn't ask favors of Zito. Everyone should stay away from him. Morgan smirks and crosses her arms in front of herself, saying they shouldn't worry about Zito. Floyd is the one who is stalking her.

## Chapter 9 – Resupply Mission

- Chas and Deidra step through the Palmtree resort fence.
- On their long walk toward Crane County, Chas expresses regret about stealing from local merchants.
- Deidra expresses concern for Morgan's safety. Zito's influence and Floyd's stalking both alarm her.
- Chas and Deidra are almost caught shoplifting produce. Leaving the store, they look up at a camera. Deidra assures him that in a store this small, the camera is either a dummy or the recordings are not saved.

## Chapter 10 – Opportunity

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<sup>7</sup> After this seasonal transition, you have an opportunity to show the changes in routines or moods of the characters that months of isolation at Palmtree would have caused.

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- Back at Palmtree, Chas expresses resolve not to participate in further shoplifting. There must be another way to survive.<sup>8</sup>
- Horace asks Chas about the daily pyrotechnics budget at Adventure Worlds, hinting at a new scheme.
- Misfired fireworks from the park are salvaged and saved for New Year's Eve and July 4th shows.
- Horace proposes selling the misfires to other theme parks as a revenue stream. That could bring enough money for all of them to begin new lives.
- The response to that is skepticism. Several concerns are raised.
- Horace suggests Zito might trade access to his car in return for a little maintenance and a fill-up. It's Zito's gasoline, but Zito has never pumped gasoline.

### **Chapter 11 – Horace's Demonstration**

- Weeks later, Morgan confides in Chas that she and Horace have been celebrating New Year's early, day-drinking.
- Chas notes that the "Horace's haul" of fireworks hasn't gained them anything.
- Morgan reveals that Horace had set up a demonstration.
- Shocked, Chas asks the inebriated Morgan to explain.
- Morgan shares that Horace loaded misfires into the Water Parade barges.<sup>9</sup>

### **Chapter 12 – Warnings**

- Chas rushes to warn Deidra about the fireworks plan.
- Deidra shows him newspaper coverage of a previous Water Parade "bombing."

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<sup>8</sup> At this decisive change in Chas's moral arc, consider including a backstory memory that drives his decision.

<sup>9</sup> As the stakes are raised, stress and suspense increase. This would be a good opportunity for Chas to express his concerns about the risks Horace is taking and the potential disruption to an Adventure Worlds show. He remains loyal to the company, even after his layoff.

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- The explosions were linked to an extortion note threatening a New Year's Eve disaster.
- Chas and Deidra search frantically for Morgan.
- Morgan has vanished.

### **Chapter 13 – New Year's Eve**

- The group discovers that all the fireworks have been taken from storage.
- Horace, Zito, Floyd, and Morgan are missing.
- Deidra pleads with Chas to stay out of Horace's way, insisting it's the safest option and that Morgan is in danger.

### **Chapter 14 – A New Alliance**

- Morgan and Floyd return in the van Floyd had previously used as a mobile shelter.
- Horace and Zito have been arrested, ending their dangerous plans.
- Floyd had followed Morgan and helped her escape, revealing unexpected resourcefulness.<sup>10</sup>
- Chas, Deidra, Morgan, and Floyd decide to leave for North Carolina together.
- Floyd knows of another abandoned timeshare resort where they can live off-grid and start anew.

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<sup>10</sup> To avoid a potential "deus ex machina" surprise, consider some strategic foreshadowing! There could be occasions where Floyd seemed to stalk Morgan. Deidra would confront him, but the apparent stalking continues. Chas could later learn that Floyd had a daughter who tragically died at Morgan's age. Floyd blames himself for not protecting his daughter.

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## Recommendations

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