

## **The First Two Pages: “Quarters for the Meter”**

By Alex Segura

From *Florida Happens: Tales of Mystery, Mayhem, and Suspense from the Sunshine State*, edited by Greg Herren (Three Rooms Press)

Thanks so much for letting me come by and discuss “Quarters for the Meter,” my contribution to this year’s Bouchercon anthology.

I first wrote this story years ago, after finishing up my debut novel, *Silent City*, the first in my Anthony Award-nominated Pete Fernandez Miami Mystery series. The goal of the story was to write a prequel to the novel and give some time to Pete’s friendship with Mike Carver. Without spoiling too much, we don't really get to see much of Mike beyond the pages of *Silent City*, and I wanted to show how important this relationship was to Pete and also give readers another peek at Pete at his “bottom”—just returned to Miami in the wake of his father’s death, going through the final stages of his relationship with his soon-to-be-ex, Emily, and trying to figure out what to do with his life.

As readers of the book know, Pete takes on a case that involves a missing woman, Kathy Bentley, which then ensnares him in a much more complicated and dangerous predicament—involving the gun-for-hire known as The Silent Death. But I wanted this story to be much smaller, more intimate and brief. The perfect elements to a good short story, I think.

In the short story, we find Pete and Mike in a bar (which, if you know Pete and his struggles with drinking, shouldn't come as too much of a surprise), talking about a recurring dream Pete's been having. Dreams play a big part in *Silent City* and also later books in the series, so I wanted to retain that element. And while Pete is not yet a private eye, or even an amateur investigator, this story gives readers a look at Pete's sense of justice, as events out of his control throw what's supposed to be a quiet night out drinking with his friend for a loop.

The title, "Quarters from the Meter," is pulled from the last line of the story itself, which seemed to fit well. This is one of my earliest Pete stories, and it holds a special place for me.

I had a lot of fun writing this story, and I'm honored to see it presented in the anthology, which is so tied to my (and Pete's!) home state. Truly amazing to see a Pete story share space with so many authors I admire and look up to.

I hope you enjoy reading it.

### **The First Two Pages of "Quarters for the Meter":**

"I had this weird dream," Pete Fernandez said. "I was in a boat, but there weren't any paddles."

"That is weird," Mike said, sipping his Heineken. The jukebox was playing Waits. The Bar—a grungy gastropub located in the heart of Coral Gables—was mostly empty. It was just past six in the evening. They were in a booth a few steps away from the main bar area.

“That’s not all of it,” Pete said. He took a sip of his drink—a vodka soda—before continuing. “But then my dad showed up. He was standing in front of the boat.”

“On the water?”

“Yeah,” Pete said. The thought of his dad put a clench in his throat. It’d been only a few months since they had to put the old man in the ground, forcing Pete and his fiancé Emily to return to Miami from their home in New Jersey. “He was just standing there. Looking at me.”

“What’d you do?”

The question hung over them for a moment. The bartender, a fit blonde named Lisa, nodded at Pete politely as she walked by. He’d been back in Miami for less than six months, and he already felt unhinged.

*Emily.*

She had left a few days ago. He was living in his father’s house and he was pretty sure the only reason Mike, his best friend, was tolerating him tonight was because he was worried Pete couldn’t last very long alone.

“Nothing,” Pete said. He couldn’t bring himself to tell Mike he’d woken up to find his pillow wet from tears.

*What a mess.*

The two men walked in as if nothing, and it took Pete a second to notice they were wearing masks. The cheap, plastic kind you hated as a kid because the elastic band in back would bury itself in your head. One guy was Sylvester and the other, shorter one, was Tweety. Halloween was months away. *What the fuck was going on?*

The handful of people also in the bar seemed to be having the same reaction.

Sylvester pulled out a gun—a sawed-off—and grabbed the bartender by the hair. Lisa was a bit older than Pete. She was a good bartender—always quick with a refreshed drink or a buyback. Her scream cut through the bar and made the one or two people who were too caught up in their own bullshit turn and take notice.

“Shit,” Mike said, turning toward the two visitors. Tweety and Sylvester were facing the bar, their backs to Pete and Mike.

Sylvester had the shaft of the gun resting on Lisa’s face. She was sobbing. Tweety had thrown a black garbage bag on the bar in front of him.

He did the talking.

“Put the money in the bag and this’ll be over quick,” Tweety said. His mask bobbed up and down along with his words, giving the scene the awkward quality of a poorly-dubbed foreign film.

Pete clenched the side of their table.

Mike shot him a glance, as if to say, “Stay where you are.”

#

**Alex Segura** is the author of the Pete Fernandez mystery series, set in Miami and including *Silent City*, *Down the Darkest Street*, *Dangerous Ends*, and *Blackout*. His short stories that have appeared in numerous anthologies, and he has also written a number of best-selling and critically acclaimed comic books. He also co-writes the *Lethal Lit* podcast.