

The Poisoned Martini

The Mysteries of Syracuse
by Brian Abbott

Part I.

Wiping down the bar counter, Todd Stuart watched Rick toy with the ice cubes in his drink. Rick had ordered an Old-Fashioned, a mellow drink with blended whiskey, some sugar, and some bitters. Todd doubted it was doing much for Rick, though. The guy looked more depressed now than before he'd ordered the drink.

"What's on your mind?" asked Todd casually.

Rick's blue-grey eyes looked up at him. They were sort of friends. At least, they had mutual friends in common, and Rick hit the bar at *Alicia's* enough times. He'd certainly taken advantage of Todd's position as bartender to spill his sorrows on more than one occasion.

"Janessa and I are history."

"Aw. I'm sorry, man."

"Hey," shrugged Rick. "What can you do? I should move on, right?"

"Yeah."

Rick gulped down the rest of his drink and indicated he wanted another hit.

"You sure you wanna third?" asked Todd.

Rick nodded. "Hey, I can always call a cab."

Todd began muddling the sugar, bitters, and a little water. He stole glances at Rick and checked himself from shaking his head. In the short time he'd worked at *Alicia's*, he'd seen too many guys come in here and get wasted. Invariably a woman was involved.

"Todd, you knew Janessa Farentino right? She was in your class?"

"Well, yeah. I sorta know her. She roomed with my sister at the University. Why do you ask?"

"Do you know Abby Phelan?"

"I've heard of her." Todd arched his brows questioningly. What exactly was Rick driving at?

"But I don't know her personally."

"You've heard of Abby's reputation perhaps?"

Todd thought about that for a moment. He recalled hearing some workplace gossip about a woman who'd made a play for Alicia's husband. Abby's name had been mentioned.

"Maybe," Todd said.

"Then you probably know how Janessa would act when she found out about my fling with Abby."

"Oh."

Even if he hadn't known the names of the women involved, he knew it wouldn't be a good thing.

"You see my predicament then."

"Ah...yeah," said Todd with a quick huff.

Todd finished off the Old-fashioned with a speared cherry and orange slice and served it up to Rick who cradled the glass in his hands. As Rick lost himself gazing deep into the amber liquid, Todd turned his attentions to buffing some martini glass. Neither of them saw her.