

The Poisoned Martini

The Mysteries of Syracuse
by Brian Abbott

Part II.

She'd come to Alicia's looking for Kevin, but he wasn't there. His shift didn't start until four o'clock. Just her luck. First James, now Kevin. She couldn't show up alone tonight.

Trish paused in the archway leading to the bar and looked around. She didn't see anyone she recognized. Of course, most of the students had already left since the semester was over. The new graduates would be off to start their new lives, and the undergraduates would return to their parents' nest. Still, there were a few students left. Some were still packing, some were planning to take summer courses, and some had unfinished business in Syracuse.

There weren't many people in the bar. Two stodgy professor types sat in the corner by the fireplace; they looked oblivious to their surroundings as they debated politics. A waitress was clearing some glasses that had been left on one of the tables, and a man in a suit sat alone reading the *New York Times*.

Then, she noticed the two young men at the bar. They were both very handsome. They looked like the type of guys she'd ogle in the fashion magazine ads. In fact, the one behind the bar looked familiar. Hadn't she seen him in a student production a couple years ago? Yes, it had to be him. An actor. She didn't particularly like theater, but she loathed actors. All the ones she'd met were either vain or gay.

If only Kevin had been available. He would have been the perfect replacement for James. Both were good-looking in a bookish sort of way. Not too nerdy. Either one would have been an ideal date for tonight. James was supposed to go with her, but he'd backed out this morning.

Now, she eyed the young man at the bar. She sidled up to the bar and sat on the stool next to him. He was staring into his drink, preoccupied by his own thoughts, so she felt she could study his profile at leisure. He was handsome enough, in a boyish fashion. Strands of his brown hair fell across his brow and nearly into his blue eyes. He had a fine straight nose that was neither too small nor too large. He wore a yellow dress shirt, untucked over blue jeans, and brown loafers. She noticed he wasn't wearing socks.

Suddenly, he looked up at her.

"Oh," she said, "I'm sorry. Was someone sitting here?"

It would be just her luck for him to be unavailable.

He shook his head. "Nah. Feel free."

He turned back to his whiskey and took a sip.

"Can I get something for you?" asked the bartender.

"Oh, um..." She turned to the young man next to her. "That looks interesting."

"This," he said, holding up his glass. "You might want to rethink that. You're better off with something sweeter."

She smiled at him. "What would you suggest then?"

He considered her for a moment, studying her lovely features, her auburn hair and doe-like brown eyes.

"You look like a wine drinker. Maybe a Sangria?"

She smiled again. "Since you're having whiskey..." Turning to the bartender, she said, "I'll have a whiskey sour." Surreptitiously, she eyed the young man next to her to catch his reaction.

"I should probably ask for ID," suggested the bartender.

Trish rolled her eyes. She dug in her purse for her driver's license. After shuffling through a few plastic cards, she pulled out her proof of age and slapped it down on the bar, conveniently giving the young man a chance to see it.

He looked.

"You don't look like a Patricia."

"Oh, please call me, Trish. Only my Mom calls me Patricia."

He nodded. "All right, Trish."

"And you are?"

"Rick."

"Is that short for Richard?"

He almost choked on his drink. "Y-yes, but...well, it's a long story."

"I have time."