

# *The Poisoned Martini*

The Mysteries of Syracuse  
by Brian Abbott

## **Part IV.**

Trish couldn't have hoped for a better outcome.

"Would you really? I'd hate to show up alone."

He shrugged. "I'm always up for a great party. Why not?"

Trish, who'd nearly held her breath awaiting his response, grinned. *Success!* This would be far better than if she'd shown up with Kevin or James. She didn't think Rick was known to her sorority crowd, and they'd be all the more intrigued by him...and his looks. Now all she had to do was keep him from backing out...

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Just before six o'clock, sunlight crept into the second floor bedroom. As the minutes passed, the light lengthened, moving across the room, until it alighted upon one young man's eyelids, poor barriers to keep out such bright rays.

Consciousness invaded Rick Gray's mind, and with it the realization that his head throbbed painfully. The discomfort was greater than his desire to remain in sleep's embrace. His eyes fluttered open. The increased exposure to the light only made the throbbing worse. He slapped his right hand over his face and shut his eyes. How much had he drunk last night?

Feeling stiff, he stretched himself under the covers. As he did so, his left foot brushed against something cold. He sat up—the bed sheets slipping to his waist—and rubbed at his eyes. Bleary-eyed, he turned to see someone bundled under the covers next to him. Glancing down at his own bare chest caused him to wonder just what had happened last night.

He tried to think back to yesterday. He remembered a pretty young girl with honey blond hair. Patricia...no, Trish was her name. She'd invited him to a party. Should he wake her?

He looked at the huddled form next to him. In this light, her hair looked more platinum and longer than he remembered. He could just see the profile of her face. *Oh, God*, he thought. It wasn't Trish!

He kneaded his forehead with his fingertips. He needed to think, but his head was pounding now. He'd had hangovers before but this one was an all new worst. Absolutely not what he needed, lying in bed next to a stranger he'd probably slept with.

Should he wake her? No, *that* would be awkward. He couldn't recall her name, wasn't even sure he knew it. Best just to leave quietly and hope for the best.

Carefully, he slid his legs out from under the covers and onto the floor. He started to get up, but as he did, he thought he heard voices out in the hall. Distracted, he stepped on his jeans, which slid on the hardwood floors, and he tumbled out of the bed, taking the coverlet with him. To his already aching head, the thump he made sounded like a boom. He held his breath. The voices in the hall, if they'd ever been there, were gone. He craned his neck to look at the girl in the bed, but she

hadn't stirred.

Untangling himself from the sheets, he grabbed his jeans and stood up. At least he was still wearing his boxers. He stepped into his jeans and scanned the floor for the rest of his clothes. They were just beyond the foot of the bed. He'd started toward them when he stopped suddenly. In his periphery, he'd thought he'd seen...

Blood...

Oh, God...She was spattered with blood. Rick rubbed his hands over his face, trying to blot out the image. Then he noticed, on his left forearm, streaks of dried blood. Her blood. Dammit! Why couldn't the pain in his head go away! He pounded his palm against his forehead as if it would cut through the pain. *Think, think, think...*

No thoughts coalesced. He just moved. He grabbed for his shirt. Underneath it, on the floor, he saw the knife. Of course there was blood on it. And some on the inside of his shirt. How could this be happening?

He had to get out of here. He scrambled to jam his feet into his shoes. Then, never letting go of his shirt, he strode quickly and quietly toward the bedroom door. He inched it open and peered out. He didn't see anyone about, didn't hear anymore voices. He dared one last glance back...and then he fled.