

The Poisoned Martini

The Mysteries of Syracuse
by Brian Abbott

Part V.

Shutting the front door behind him, Rick crept into the house on Willow Lane. He paused at the foot of the stairs and listened. It didn't sound like anyone was up yet. Thank God! He looked down at the bloodstained shirt clutched in his hand. Why hadn't he gotten rid of it? He had to get rid of it. But how?

He started up the stairs. The fourth step creaked. Again, he stopped and listened. The sound, which had seemed so loud to his ears, faded into silence again. As lightly as he could, he jaunted upstairs. He'd been lucky so far. He didn't think anyone had seen him leaving the sorority. His car—he had fortunately remembered—hadn't been parked too far away. He'd had to jog across Walton Park, but he didn't notice anyone else about. It had been four minutes past six o'clock when he'd started his car, a compact sedan that he hoped wouldn't draw any attention as he drove away. Traffic had been near nonexistent Saturday morning, and he'd taken a few back roads to get to his grandfather's house.

Presently, as he reached his bedroom door, he heard a voice. He tossed the shirt in his room and quickly shut the door as he turned around.

"Rick, is that you?" Dressed in a robe over a silk pajama suit, his grandfather stood at the end of the hall, rubbing the corner of his eye. "Why are you up so early?"

"I...ah...was feeling a bit...peckish." He tried to act nonchalant as he grandfather drew near. "I thought I'd whip up some eggs."

"Dear God!" Thaddeus Alcott winced. "I can smell the alcohol on you from here." Here was a mere five feet away. "You must cease this incessant sneaking in—" He broke off, realizing his voice was growing too loud. More quietly, he continued, "It's not right for you to parade around drunk in the middle of the night. Your cousin is barely fourteen years of age, and I'll not have him picking up such habits at his impressionable young age."

Rick couldn't help himself; he snorted. "Don't worry. My cousin's not the impressionable type."

"He looks up to you. He's already lied to the police once to protect you when you—"

"Don't remind me," interrupted Rick. He certainly didn't want to be thinking about his involvement in the murders that had happened at the Syracuse Botanical Gardens. "God, not now," he muttered. The murders at the Gardens might be solved and done with, but that girl's body at the sorority...

"I suppose you're still hung-over," remarked Thaddeus. "Go put on a shirt. I'll make up an analgesic I remember from my youth."

Rick watched his grandfather shuffle toward the stairs. *He really should pick up his feet*, thought Rick, mindful that the old man had suffered a couple nasty spills over the past year. No broken bones or anything too serious, just very unpleasant and nasty-looking bruising. He was in his seventies, right? Rick wasn't entirely sure. His grandfather guarded his age as lawyerly as he did his clients' secrets.

"Grandfather..."

Thaddeus paused on the landing. As he looked back up at his grandson, he heard Rick say, “You’ve solved a murder before, haven’t you?”