

# *The Poisoned Martini*

The Mysteries of Syracuse  
by Brian Abbott

## **Part VI.**

Thaddeus Alcott had seen that look before. The nervous, involuntary shifting of the eyes. The facial muscles trying too hard to maintain a façade of calm. The slight trembling of the hands. Subtle signs of guilt.

His voice suddenly hoarse, Thaddeus whispered, “What have you done?”

Rick rushed down the stairs toward him. The words gushed out. “It wasn’t my fault. I mean, it couldn’t have been. I just woke up, and there she was. I didn’t even know her—”

Thaddeus cut him off with a wave of his hand.

“Rick, go get dressed. Then come down to the kitchen and tell me precisely what happened.”

Rick nodded and then started back up the stairs. Thaddeus added, “And don’t make too much noise. Your cousin’s still asleep, and I don’t want him waking up prematurely. He doesn’t need to overhear this.”

With that admonishment, Thaddeus proceeded to the kitchen all the while thinking about murder. What had his grandson done? It had been years since Thaddeus had taken on a criminal case. Not that he’d escaped involvement in murder cases since then. There’d been those few occasions...

He shook his head. Those had been fortunate situations in which he’d discovered facts that had helped solve a murder. That hadn’t been typical of his experience. Murder was messy. He’d had clients, both innocent and guilty, and defending them at trial cost a toll. Whether he had known of their guilt or not, his profession demanded that he serve the interest of his clients to the best of his abilities. There came a time, though, when he couldn’t do it anymore. So for the past twenty-six years, Thaddeus had focused solely on estate and corporate law.

As he set the coffee pot to percolate, Thaddeus imagined several horrific scenarios in which his grandson might have been involved. By the time Rick joined him in the kitchen, Thaddeus felt he was prepared to face whatever truth he learned. Or so he hoped.

“I met this girl,” began Rick. “She invited me to this sorority party on campus last night. We danced, had fun...”

“And drank no doubt,” said Thaddeus.

Rick nodded, ashamed. “We all did,” he said lamely.

Thaddeus crossed his arms and looked sternly at his grandson.

“Look,” said Rick. “Things haven’t been okay since Janessa left me. I really thought we had something.”

“So that’s an excuse to go out and get so drunk you kill someone?”

“I didn’t,” protested Rick. “I couldn’t have.”

Thaddeus listened as Rick told him what had transpired or at least as much as he remembered. Many of the details were hazy. The arrival at the party, meeting the sorority sisters and their dates, music, dancing, and then... Well, his grandson wasn’t entirely sure. All he remembered clearly was waking up early this morning and discovering the dead girl beside him in bed.

“I panicked, Granddad. I didn’t know what had happened, and there was all this blood. I just

left.”

“And came straight here?”

Rick nodded.

Thaddeus reflected on Rick’s story as he poured out some coffee. He filled up two mugs with the black liquid. Handing one to Rick, he said, “Drink up. I want you as clear-headed as possible for the police.”

“The police?”

“Rick, it’s your civic responsibility to report this crime. I won’t have a grandson of mine withholding evidence either. You said your shirt, the one with the blood on it, it’s upstairs?”

“Yes, but—”

Thaddeus held up his hand and cut him off. “We’ll be handing that over to the police.” He thought back to an earlier point. “The knife. You didn’t touch the knife did you?”

Rick shook his head. “No. I don’t think so.”

Thaddeus considered that. “We’ll have to prepare for the eventuality that your fingerprints may be on it.”

“Oh, God!” Rick buried his head in his hands. “This can’t be happening.”

Thaddeus crossed the room and laid a comforting hand on his grandson’s shoulder. “Rick,” he began, “I’m here for you, and I will get to the bottom of this.”

Rick looked up at him, staring up with teary green eyes. “You don’t think I did it, do you?”

“No,” said Thaddeus firmly. He was careful not to show any fear or doubt. If anything, he suspected his grandson was being framed.

Patting his grandson’s shoulder, he said, “Now, drink up your coffee. It’s time to call the police.”