

## THE BARTENDER'S TALE

Darcy had been a bartender for most of his adult life, and an alcoholic for a good deal longer.

“He would have made a good investigative reporter,” his ex-wife told the judge at the divorce hearing, “every bottle is like an important news story to him, full of intrigue and mystery, and he can't wait to get to the bottom of it.”

But more charitably she might at least have admitted that during the years of their marriage he had at least been a functional alcoholic. Indeed, in his chosen profession Darcy was uniquely gifted; the only bartender this side of the Atlantic initiated in the arcane mysteries of a concoction that he had largely invented himself from certain secret and ancient ingredients and mystical potions known only to him. And when these were combined and served in a specially manufactured glass, they produced a magical drink he had christened “The Celtic Sunset”.

Darcy, his first name, was an antiquated adaptation of D’Arcy, and probably of French origin. But the effect of the man himself was purely Irish. Shaw, his last name, had historically been O’Shaughnessy, and his flushed and pinkish complexion, the tinges of red amongst the gray in his hair, and the erratic pattern of burst capillaries in his bulbous nose all bore witness to both his heritage and to his affliction. But Darcy was not only a talented mixologist and an entrepreneur when it came to thinking up new cocktails to field test on his customers, but a performance artist as well whenever he was called upon to serve up his masterpiece, The Celtic Sunset.

“Any good bartender worth his rock salt is part confidante, part psychologist, and part entertainer,” he would happily acknowledge to his clientele.

And Darcy was all of these. And his portfolio of jokes included of course the usual drunken Irishman stereotypes. Striking a well-polished philosophical pose perfected from telling the same joke for decades, and using a beer glass as a prop, he would ask the gallery of drinkers assembled at the bar: “If an optimist sees the glass as half full, then what do you call a person who sees it as half empty?”

“A pessimist?” someone would inevitably answer.

“No,” Darcy would tell his assembled audience, “Ted Kennedy”. And by slapping the bar for emphasis and deftly directing his punchline at anyone who was on at least their third round, he could be assured of a laugh. But then with perfect comedic timing he would switch from philosophy and politics to religion.

“The Bible tells us that the 12 tribes of Israel wandered in the desert for forty years,” he would orate over the din to the few Friday night survivors who had successfully circumnavigated Happy Hour, “but in all that time, what were the Israelites searching for?”

The punchline for this one required a confederate, and tonight Darcy’s accomplice was none other than Dame Margaret *Maggie* Fosdike. Smoking had reduced her once lusty bray to little more than a throaty whisper, but she gamely wheezed out: “A sober Irishman!”

Back in the day, young Maggie had been at the top of every man’s hit parade but sadly these days she was just a little past her expiration date. Originally she had hailed from Handbridge, a small English

town in Chester just South of Manchester, and had legitimately acquired the title 'Dame', now 'Grand Dame', through her marriage to a bona fide English Lord. But here in The United States she rarely used it, preferring just Maggie. In fact she considered it pretentious to assume an English title in the Americas, and especially one that in her opinion had been hijacked by commoners and was most often used by elderly but wealthy and socially ambitious women with aristocratic pretensions.

Her former husband, Lord Cedric Pendleton Fosdike, the third of that name, now deceased, had been a member of what might be termed by Royal watchers "a splinter branch" of the British Royal Family. Which only meant that in 20<sup>th</sup> Century George VI's England, Lord Fosdike and Maggie would not have been sitting down to tea regularly with His Majesty. And even had the opportunity ever presented itself, the unassuming Sir Cedric - or "Pooky" as Maggie had fondly referred to him in private - would probably have declined.

According to Maggie he had never really gotten the hang of being a part of the English nobility, and it was his genetic lack of *noblisse oblige* that ultimately proved his undoing. His peerage combined with his marriage to Maggie should have exempted him from military service and certainly from combat in World War II. But bowing to family pressures and perhaps outdated notions of duty to King and country he had naively, in Maggie's oft-stated opinion, accepted a commission in the British Army and marched off to war where at The Battle of the Bulge a German 'potato masher' had put an end to Maggie's hopes for children of noble birth and left her a widow at the tender age of 22. And though she might have remarried, the fact that she had not and had remained a widow could be attributed entirely to the early demise of a husband whom she had dearly loved. Although, in the ensuing decades and even as late as the Falkland Islands crisis, rumors of her romantic liaisons had been legion and widely circulated. But in the words of her aristocratic and morally discreet social circle there had been no children "to speak of".

And as she delivered the requisite punchline, Darcy, pausing like a late night comedian waiting for a drum roll, pointed approvingly at her. Over the years he had delivered these and many other jokes so well and with such enthusiastic audience reception, that many of the bar's regulars had often commented that instead of wasting such comedic talents behind the bar working as a mere bartender, he should have been on stage doing stand-up comedy.

But as far as Darcy was concerned, bartending was itself a noble and honorable profession. And as he had discovered long ago, it was the place where his true talents lay. Keeping the customers entertained in his opinion was merely an occupational sideline that was required of any good "landlord", as the Brits and the Irish would have called him. Sadly, here in The United States, that title belonged only to the actual owner of the bar or the building. And regrettably in Darcy's case, even though owning his own bar had always been his dream, he had never been able to 'hold to the copper' long enough to afford one. So now here he was stuck in middle age still taking crap from a never-ending succession of sleazy and less talented but more enfranchised bar owners. And for the last ten years that had included one Mikolas Stephanopoulos, the fat, greasy, swarthy, and in Darcy's opinion, semi-retarded son of a wealthy expatriate Greek shipping magnate.

## A PIRATE LOOKS AT EIGHTY

Darcy had seen the old man in the bar only once in the whole time he had worked there. He came in one morning trailed closely by Mikolas and his younger sister Adelpha. They were chattering away in Greek - which to Darcy was of course Greek - and seemed to be arguing about something. There was much waving of hands in the air and at one point the old man had pulled out the empty pockets of his pants; so Darcy guessed the conversation was about money, sex and money being Mikolas's favorite subjects. But Darcy figured that the old man, who looked to be well into his 80's, at that age must be pretty much down to just the money. And he was sure that his profligate and dissolute son had been squandering plenty of it.

But in contrast to the bloated and corpulent visages of his children - Adelpha's face was a puffed-up slice of Baklava similar to her older brother's - the elder Stephanopoulos was small and trim. He stood only about 5'7", with his white hair receded to the top of his head. Adelpha was nearly the same height and Mikolas, who was at least half a head taller, must have outweighed him by 100 pounds. But his rough, scarred and calloused hands told the story of a much harder life than his offsprings'. He reminded Darcy of the photos he had seen in the news of Carlo Gambino before his death, except that Mikolas' father's complexion was darker and his skin more wrinkled.

Darcy had always suspected, and it had been rumored amongst his customers, that Mikolas had satirically named the bar after his elderly father with whom he reportedly had a love-hate relationship. But seeing the man in the flesh, Darcy thought that *The Ancient Mariner*, to borrow from Coleridge, might have been a better name for the place. Mikolas had always denied the rumor, likely fearful of offending his chief patron and sole provider. And to support his claim that the name referred only to the fanciful Greek heroes and legends of his heritage, he had adorned the walls of the bar with framed prints of actual and fictional ancient Greek battle scenes. Like for instance Jacques-Louis David's famous portrait entitled *Leonidas at Thermopylae*, that depicted a scene from the pivotal Spartan battle against the Persians at the pass of Thermopylae in 480 B.C. In addition he had hung scenes from Homer's *The Iliad* by other artists. A plaster bust of Alexander the Great stood on a pedestal at the entrance to the bar, chipped in places where exiting drunks had knocked it over, giving it the look entirely by accident of an authentic artifact that had weathered the ages. Interspersed with these icons of the history of his people, Mikolas had also hung yellowing mounted photos from his village in Matala, Crete. These included snapshots of the old man as a still young man, and pictures of himself as a small child - which only proved to Darcy that, just as he had always considered him, Mikolas was both literally and figuratively a Cretin.

The elder Stephanopoulos walked with a slight limp, assisted by a solid gold-tipped cane that at that moment he was using as a pointer to indicate to the fawning junior Stephanopoulos those features of the bar that he felt needed changing - which, for Darcy, only served to subtly reinforce the image of a Greek Godfather that from the man's appearance he had already formed. These gestures also made it clear that, while Mikolas was the nominal owner of the bar, his father was the principal broker of the family enterprise and firmly in control of everything but day-to-day operations. And of course this made him Darcy's real boss. Which, had it been possible for Darcy to have any less respect for Mikolas' authority, might well have been a factor in his general disdain for the younger man.

To any attractive young woman at the bar foolish enough to pay him even a moment's attention, Mikolas had always claimed that he was the son of a wealthy Greek shipping tycoon. And although he

had never gone so far as to claim that his father was on the level of say an Onassis, he had at least subtly hinted that he was only a few rungs further down the ladder. One of the photos that hung on the wall of the bar was of a younger version of the man who now stood before them, posed in front of a building with a large sign printed in Greek lettering. Mikolas had earlier translated this for Darcy as “Stephanopoulos and Sons, International Shipping”, and he was full of stories of his father’s exploits. Having worked behind the bar now for years, Darcy had heard all of them many times. But “Doc” Philips, a County Medical Examiner, and one of the regulars, who had frequented the establishment long before Darcy’s tenure, was even more familiar than Darcy with Stephanopoulos family lore. Unfortunately he had made the mistake on several occasions in Mikolas' presence of commenting on one of the photos, and this had immediately launched the corpulent Greek on a too-much-information tirade through which Darcy, Doc, and whomever else happened to be at the bar was forced to suffer.

The latest time had been regarding an aging photo of Mikolas’ older brother, Stavros, who had stayed behind in Greece when the rest of the family had emigrated to the United States. It showed him standing on the deck of a boat, a broad grin on his face, wearing a wetsuit and surrounded by what appeared to be diving gear and underwater camera equipment. Doc was no diver, even having lived in Florida for decades he had never been in water any deeper than he could penetrate by holding his breath, and his limited knowledge of the deep and its denizens was restricted to what he had learned from old Cousteau documentaries. But from repeated viewings of these films he was at least able to recognize a few of the brand names on the brightly colored pieces of gear scattered about the deck of Stavros’ boat. *Scuba Pro*, *Tabata*, *Oceanic* and Cousteau’s signature brand, *U.S. Divers*, were all familiar, but one particular cammy-colored piece of breathing apparatus without a brand name, that appeared to be military surplus equipment, puzzled him.

But Darcy, who had seen underwater photographers in the Keys using similar gear, attempted to help him out.

“That's a Rebreather,” he said, “designed originally for military use; covert operations, Navy SEALs, and that kind of thing.”

Now completely confused, Doc asked, “Old Man Stephanopoulos was a Navy SEAL?”

“No, no,” Darcy laughed, “film crews and photographers use them too. No bubbles.”

And Mikolas, who at that instant had suddenly appeared behind Darcy, immediately seized upon this explanation.

"Yeah, bubbles scare the fish away," he said.

And now Doc too vaguely remembered that Cousteau in his movies had mentioned something about “SCUBA without bubbles”. A few of the films had featured photographers using similar equipment to film schools of fish or particularly skittish underwater creatures, so this made sense to him. Except that there were no fish in any of the underwater pictures on the wall, only tumbled down ruins, broken pottery, and the occasional grainy shot of what looked to him like statues heavily encrusted with barnacles and marine growth. And Doc had also noticed, and immediately pointed this out to Darcy, that the quality of the underwater shots that Stephanopoulos and Son had taken were extremely poor, at least by Cousteau standards, and in consideration of the fact that the Greek Isles were known for their crystal clear waters. A few of the pictures had been shot at night under obviously poor lighting conditions, and this despite evidence in the photos of underwater lighting equipment on the boat. To Doc's way of thinking it was as if the photographer had been indifferent to his subject matter and to the quality of the pictures, interested only in obtaining rough location shots of the objects in the pictures.

And this was borne out by markings scribbled in white ink at the bottom of each of the photos that appeared to be some sort of navigational heading, possibly Loran or GPS, although he couldn't have said for sure, since navigation and seamanship were not among his areas of expertise.

According to Mikolas, he had been no more than 10 years old when the photos had been taken, and so had not accompanied his brother and father on these trips. But he did remember that it was at about this time that his father had developed a sudden and passionate interest in the antiquities of his homeland, mostly of the submerged variety, and had filled the house with books on ancient Greek and Roman artifacts. Mikolas and his younger sister would frequently come home from school only to find their father and older brother poring over maps and nautical charts, a practice that often continued far into the night.

Of course diving on the site of ancient artifacts without special permission was strictly controlled by the Greek government and usually proscribed by Greek law. But in recanting his tales at the bar, Mikolas had always assured his audience that his father's intentions had been only to photograph the objects for posterity. On the other hand, Doc had come up with a more plausible explanation, but one that he had only confided to Darcy. He suspected that Mikolas' older brother, Stavros, who was obviously not trained in underwater photography and for their purposes probably did not need to be, had first taken pictures of the statues and artifacts in the daytime, carefully marking their locations under what would appear to be perfectly ordinary and legal circumstances, explaining perhaps to any inquiring authorities that the photos were to be sold to the tourists. But Doc figured that Mikolas' explanation about the use of rebreathers to film fish was probably only a retelling of a fiction that his father had made up to satisfy the curiosity of a small boy. And Doc was pretty sure that the pictures now adorning the walls of The Ancient Greek Bar and Grill were the last shots ever taken of certain priceless antiquities in their original locations.

Darcy too had wondered where Mikolas' father had gotten the rebreathers and was surprised to learn that, in his confusion, Doc had not been entirely off-base. According to Mikolas, his father had at one time served in the Greek Navy. And to prove this he had pointed to a picture of his father, still in his late 30's, dressed in camouflage pants and a white cotton T-shirt standing in front of a 50-caliber machine gun mounted on the deck of a small ship. The Greek flag, blue and white stripes with a white cross in the corner, flew from its mast. And hanging beneath this was a pennant with the same Greek lettering Darcy could see in all of the photos of the buildings and boats that belonged to Stephanopoulos and Sons, International Shipping.

"Kind of out of uniform isn't he?" Doc had remarked while viewing the photo.

"Not if you're the Captain and you own the boat," Mikolas had proudly answered.

But to Darcy this explanation sounded suspiciously like some kind of privateer arrangement - privately owned ships used for military purposes, their owners commissioned as provisional naval officers - that had been common practice in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. And one of the most famous privateers of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century was Capt. William Kidd whose name Darcy had often heard being bandied about in bars he had worked in in The Keys; before what had turned out to be his forced migration Northward to Orlando. Unfortunately his customers' knowledge of such things had been pretty much limited to the lyrics of Jimmy Buffett songs. But in Key West, in one of these bars, a framed reproduction had hung on the wall of a farewell ditty supposedly written by Capt. Kidd to his crew mates and fellow seamen. Printed shortly after his execution, it had later been popularly portrayed as his confession, and became known as *Captain Kidd's Farewell to the Sea*, or *The Pirate's Lament*. The bar in which it had hung no longer existed, blown away in its entirety by Hurricane George just shortly before Darcy's departure

from the Keys, but luckily Darcy had made a copy for his own amusement:

"My name was Captain Kidd,  
When I sail'd, when I sail'd,  
And so wickedly I did,  
God's laws I did forbid,  
When I sail'd, when I sail'd;

I roam'd from sound to sound,  
And many a ship I found,  
And then I sunk or burn'd,  
When I sail'd;

I murder'd William Moore,  
And laid him in his gore,  
Not many leagues from shore,  
When I sail'd;

Farewell to young and old,  
All jolly seamen bold,  
You're welcome to my gold,  
For I must die, I must die;

Farewell to Lunnon town,  
The pretty girls all round,  
No pardon can be found,  
And I must die, I must die;

Farewell for I must die,  
Then to eternity,  
In hideous misery,  
I must lie, I must lie."

For the benefit of his customers and in hopes of upping his tips with a good pirate yarn, Darcy had boned up on the infamous Capt. Kidd. What he had learned from his research was that Kidd had actually started his colorful but ultimately murderous career as a legitimate English privateer. Even up until the bitter end he had staunchly maintained that his mission had been sanctioned by the English Crown. And to his amazement, Darcy had discovered that actual documentation had eventually surfaced to support Capt. Kidd's claim.

Unfortunately, not until well after Capt. Kidd had been hung for piracy. And in the fashion of the times his execution was a grisly affair. In accordance with the severe penalties at the time under English law, it was not sufficient that he be publicly hung. Once. After his dead body had been strung up an additional two times, the corpse was taken down and tarred, then mounted in a steel cage and hung along the Thames for display to passing ships and their crews - a charming practice of the day known as 'gibbeting'. And it was not until several years later that it was finally removed.

The intent of all this to most people might have appeared to be as a deterrent to would-be pirates. But, from what he had read regarding Capt. Kidd's dealings with the English Crown during his lifetime,

Darcy figured that more than likely it had been meant instead as a warning to legitimate privateers and other aspiring brigands not to get behind in their licensing fees to the Crown. In any case Capt. Kidd had richly deserved his fate in Darcy's opinion, if not for piracy then at least for the bad poetry.

But another of the normally dour Greek's yarns, whenever the occasion arose, was the liberally embellished tale of the migratory voyage of the Stephanopoulos clan from the island of Crete to The United States. The family had arrived in Miami in the early 1970's on board a tramp steamer owned by Mikolas' grandfather, in Mikolas' own words "traveling through rough seas in the company of even rougher sailors." A photo of the family disembarking at Customs in Miami hung on the wall of the bar, supporting at least that part of the narrative. But after Mikolas' many retellings, including several entirely new versions, the story had expanded from a simple travelogue to a Greek saga of epic proportions rivaling *The Odyssey*.

What Doc and Darcy had at first not understood was what would have prompted Mikolas' father to embark, with his entire family, on a long dangerous ocean voyage, exposing them to unnecessary hazards at sea when with his reported wealth they might have simply hopped a plane and flown to the United States. According to Mikolas, the entire trip had taken many weeks and curiously, instead of steaming directly into The Port of Miami, the ship had hung offshore at anchor for days. And during that time it had been visited by several smaller vessels, invariably at night.

To Mikolas, as a young boy, the whole trip had of course been a grand adventure, and he had especially remembered a thrilling boat ride with his father in the middle of the night across The Florida Straits on a high speed cigarette boat similar to the ones he would later see on American TV in episodes of *Miami Vice*. His father had introduced the man driving the boat to him as a distant cousin, though he could not recall his father ever mentioning him before that first meeting. Or since. Obviously the cousin was not Greek, and in fact he spoke precious little English. About the only thing they seemed to have in common was that, as his father had said, they had both been raised on an island. It seemed at the time to Mikolas' that his father had a lot of cousins who had been raised on islands. But the man's homeland had been somewhere South of Florida, Mikolas could not remember exactly where, only that it was a long way from Greece.

Mikolas' mother, who was now the chief cook at the Ancient Greek - and both Darcy and Doc would have had to admit that the food was excellent - had never wanted to leave her native land at all. Mikolas' older brother, Stavros, had absolutely refused to go and still to this day lives in Crete. But Mikolas remembered that on the night of their departure there had been a terrible family argument. And later, shortly after their arrival in Miami, his father had been visited one night by another bunch of 'distant cousins'. Mikolas and his sister had already been in bed and had only heard the men downstairs engaged with their father in what had sounded to them like an argument. Though it had been a little hard for them to tell what was going on because the men were all speaking to their father in Italian through an interpreter who spoke Greek only brokenly. These cousins too, his father had later explained, also hailed from an island, though one a little closer to Greece, somewhere across the Ionian Sea just a hop, skip, and a jump from the Greek Isles. Shortly thereafter the family moved again. This time from Miami to New York City, settling finally in Brooklyn, and for the next 20 years operated a popular neighborhood Greek eatery there. And as Darcy and Mikolas to their mutual delight later discovered, it had been located in a neighborhood not far from where Darcy himself had grown up.

But then finally the Stephanopoulos family had moved back to Florida. Why, had never been exactly clear to Doc or Darcy, but as Mikolas had told it, it was his father's passion for travel that had occasioned the move, and with his advancing years catching up to him, his desire to move to a warmer climate. And on at least this point Doc and Darcy could agree. *Something* had caught up to Mikolas'

father. But neither of them thought for an instant that it had anything to do with wanderlust, or his advancing years, though it may have been literally true that he had needed to leave New York City for his health, and in a hurry.

So again the Stephanopoulos family had made the trip to sunny Florida; but this time they had gone no further than Orlando.

“Or as close to Miami,” Doc had commented, “as the old man may have wanted to get.”



## ANCIENT GREEK HISTORY

The Ancient Greek Bar and Grill is located just on the North end of downtown Orlando proper next to Lake Eola, the artificial lake in the center of the city. And on sunny afternoons in a little park next to the lake condo owners, tourists, and the homeless dine side-by-side on outdoor tables and park benches provided by the city. The bar is in the basement of an adjacent building that houses condos that overlook the lake. In Orlando, as in other parts of Florida, the conversion of low priced rental apartments to expensive condos had recently replaced the sale of swamp land as the newest speculative boondoggle. But in some cases, clever developers had combined the two, building new condos on top of old swamp land.

The main floor of the building is occupied by a couple of quichey sidewalk eateries, a hair salon, and *Le Champignon Magie*, a French-themed restaurant that caters mostly to wealthy retired seniors. "*Les fois et en rang d'oignons*" served here somewhat resembles The Senior Early Bird Special, "Liver and Onions"; sold for a third the price around the corner, both dishes include locally grown Vidalia onions, but the French dish differs radically in that the onion slices are laid out attractively in a nice little row and garnished with a sprig of parsley. But regrettably the intimate little French bistro's menu does not include *Gâteau de Viande*, the ever popular but much maligned American dish known here simply as "Meatloaf", but for the intercontinentally constipated they do serve a nice plate of *Ragout du pruneau*.

The Ancient Greek Bar and Grill is in the basement of the building and can be reached by a metal staircase that extends downward from the ground floor to the basement level. Painted a shiny black as a rust preventative, it resembles a tenement fire escape, and on two sides it faces a concrete wall, but on the building side a barred window, tucked beneath the steps. And this was a feature much appreciated by Darcy; because during slack moments in the bar it allowed him to look up women's skirts as they descended the stairs in order to determine in advance whether their legs merited a second look as they walked through the doorway. A metal storm grate at the bottom of the staircase caught the runoff of rainwater from above, and also the overflow of the sprinklers in the nearby park; that for years had been watering the same strip of concrete sidewalk without producing any appreciable growth.

Up until the mid-90's, when Stephanopoulos Sr. bought the bar, it had been an Irish Pub with the odd name "An Barra". Darcy had immediately suspected that the name was Gaelic, though despite his Irish heritage he did not speak a word of the language, and by now was so far removed from the country of his ancestors that you could have easily convinced him that all Irish girls had red hair and green eyes. After more than four decades of living in New York City, the closest he could have come to an Irish brogue was a phony Irish lilt spoken with a Brooklyn accent, in imitation of the cops and priests he had known in his old neighborhood.

Doc, in Darcy's presence, had frequently questioned whether the Brooklynese he spoke could even be considered English.

"OK, Mikolas speaks with a Brooklyn accent too," he had admitted, "but his mother tongue is Greek, and although incomprehensible to me, Greek is unarguably a legitimate language."

Darcy had researched the bar's original name and found that although the literal translation of the name was simply *The Bar*, in this special context it had been intended as a sort of Irish pun. In Gaelic *An Barra* also means *The Bar* in the legal sense as well, and in those days the establishment had been

regularly frequented by lawyers, judges, law clerks, and court employees who worked a few blocks away in the towering courthouse building. And it had been a favorite watering hole too for politicians, developers, builders and real estate salesmen - which in Orlando was essentially the same thing.

As Doc, who had been there under the previous ownership had joked to Darcy, "you might say the joint was a popular hangout for lawyers who couldn't pass *The Bar*."

"I guess you had to be there," was Darcy's sardonic reply to Doc's attempt at humor.

But a few features of the original bar had survived the change of ownership. The most striking of these was a burnished black walnut bar that extended the entire length of the room, nicely accessorized with comfortable leather-backed wooden bar stools and solid brass hand and foot rails. Nowadays customers could sit, or lean on the hand and foot rails, and sip their drinks while Darcy delivered one of his nightly improvised floor shows. On the wall behind the bar, mounted in a gold-leaf frame, was a huge mirror, as long as the bar itself. The previous owners had imported it all the way from Dublin, and an Irish artist had painted little scenes of frolicking red-haired winged cherubs at each of its four corners; that might as well have been Darcy's baby pictures.

Pewter, ceramic and glass beer mugs hung from a rack over the bar, each one etched with the name of one of the bar's regulars. And what Doc referred to as Darcy's selection of "premium beers", venerable cask-conditioned English, Scottish, and Irish ales and stouts, were dispensed in the traditional manner from hand-drawn taps. But Darcy had corrected Doc more than once on this nomenclature, pointing out that "premium" had originally referred merely to beers that carried an import tax; priceless beer lore, he figured, that was probably wasted on a County medical wonk who drank mostly Scotch.

But why the previous owners had left behind these and other virtually irreplaceable items of their ethnic heritage had at first been a mystery to Darcy, until Mikolas had mentioned that his father, the wily old Greek, had come into possession of some valuable inside information about the place that may have alerted him to the sanguine possibilities of acquiring the lease, the liquor license, and the furnishings at a literally bargain basement price. Because by the time the bar was offered for sale by the former owners, the two young Irish entrepreneurs had backed themselves into a predicament offering only two means of escape: sell the bar immediately including all of its furnishings to the elder Stephanopoulos at a pittance of its true worth and never mind the sentimental value; or the second even worse alternative, abandon everything to a pending IRS auction and catch the next flight out of Orlando for Dublin.

But later, in response to criticisms from old time regulars like Doc that other than the food and the wall hangings, the place was mostly unchanged from the days of its Gaelic splendor, a hypothesis with which Darcy had heartily agreed - in fact it was supported by his very presence - Stephanopoulos the Younger, to his credit, had tried to add a pinch of Hellenic identity to the place. An iron railing had been erected outside, at the top of the stairwell, for the express purpose of preventing drunks, who tended to gather there at closing time, from pitching over the edge and crashing onto the steel grate below. This in itself would have been a distasteful affair, but Stephanopoulos' main objection to it was the messy cleanup afterward and the amount of paperwork that might be required by emergency personnel. But in keeping with his limited notions of "atmosphere" he had mounted a statue of *Αφροδίτη* - known in English as *Aphrodite* - at one end of the railing, anchored in Sakrete. And since she was known in Greek mythology as The Goddess of Love, Sexual Rapture, and Beauty, Darcy figured that Stephanopoulos may have futilely hoped this would somehow increase his chances for the first two, while remaining sadly aware that, even in Death, the skills of a talented mortician could not have brought even a semblance of Beauty to his homely visage.

And in like manner he had planted a statue of *Ερμής* - known in English as *Hermes* - at the other end of the railing. In Greek mythology he was known as The God of Travel and Commerce, but also in some historical accounts, The God of Thieves. A fact that had led Darcy and Doc to speculate that the statue may have been placed there in deference to, or even at the insistence of his venerable parent.

But oddly, despite the reported familiarity of Stephanopoulos the Elder with the antiquities of his homeland, neither of these statues had actually been brought over from Greece, though this in no way could be construed as a slap at Mikolas' father's procurement skills, considering what they had learned so far about the old man. Neither Doc nor Darcy had any illusions that if Mikolas' father had believed that it was worth the risk, he could have provided his son with the original sculpture of *Hermes Holding the Infant Dionysus*, or even *The Venus De Milo*.

However, the two Greek statues had indeed been imported. If only from Tijuana, Mexico. And in a way this was fortunate, because the fake classical statues had only lasted a week before they were stolen. A few of Darcy's customers later reported that the statue of *Hermes* had been spotted in the yard of a Pine Hills housing project, a circumstance that in Doc's stated opinion added an element of poetic justice to the whole affair. A sort of final tribute to The God of Thieves, his statue permanently ensconced in the middle of Orlando's worst crime infested neighborhood.

The lost statue of Aphrodite, now spray painted a garish fluorescent pink, was later discovered too adorning the entrance to *The Venus Club*, a strip joint along Orange Blossom Trail and a hangout for drug dealers known locally as "The Venus Fly Trap". It had been raided recently by the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation, and citing numerous Criminal, Civil, and Health Code violations, finally closed down by the Florida Division of Hotels and Restaurants. The statue might have been recoverable, but at that point Stephanopoulos had lost interest in the entire re-beautification project.

Early on he had also gone so far as to commission a local artist to paint a sign for the outside of the bar that depicted a scene from *The Illiad*: Achilles, dragging the mutilated corpse of Hector, tied behind his chariot, around the walls of Troy. Over the top in large Greek-style letters it had proclaimed: "The Ancient Greek Bar and Grill". But this too had been quickly looted, never to be seen again, and sadly Stephanopoulos had replaced it with only an arrow and a small block-lettered wooden sign strapped to the iron railing that read: "Ancient Greek".

But Darcy had to admit that despite his general dislike for the man and the slovenly Greek's personal repulsiveness, he owed Stephanopoulos a small debt of gratitude for putting up with his own erratic work ethic and peculiar habits. Not to mention, which Stephanopoulos seldom had, the frequent cat-dragged-in-morning-afters when Darcy would report punctually for work and then promptly pass out on the large cooler in the back stockroom until the bar officially opened for business. And what had also gone unremarked was Darcy's shameless pilfering of the bar's liquor inventory, right under his boss' extremely prominent nose, as if it were an expected supplement to his admittedly meager wages. Though he was pretty sure that none of this had gone unnoticed, perhaps only for the lack of evidence that Stephanopoulos was undoubtedly in the process of gathering.

And it was also probably true, in the currently faltering economy, that for even the miniscule hourly wage that the parsimonious proprietor of The Ancient Greek was paying him, Stephanopoulos could have replaced Darcy with three part-time college students from Rollins College, or The University of Central Florida, to do what passed for bartending these days - dispensing a few squirts from a metered beverage gun. Darcy had steadfastly refused to touch one of these throughout his entire professional career as a bartender, and this unshakeable conviction had made him for a time unemployable in Orlando; until he had happened upon The Ancient Greek, where old country standards of quality and

service warred constantly with the new generation's embrace of American cost-cutting thrift and shortcut taking. Darcy's off-stated and unsolicited complaint was that anyone with a working trigger finger could operate a beverage gun and call himself a bartender; even if they couldn't have put together an Irish coffee without consulting a computer screen, and believed that Grenadine was a city in Spain. In his opinion a trained monkey could do it. Of this he was certain, having trained plenty of them himself. But in Darcy's defense, it could be said that it was his positive genius for tending bar that had kept him employed all these years, and not just the tolerance of a few select bar owners like Stephanopoulos.

And in this special case, it was probably the two men's shared Brooklyn roots that had not only guaranteed Darcy's continued employment but kept them from killing each other. And although they had never actually known each other in The Big Apple, they later discovered that the neighborhoods in which they had grown up were only four blocks from each other. Of course in densely populated Brooklyn where four blocks can sometimes be home to roughly a thousand people, this did not exactly make them neighbors.

"Hey, ya' fat Greek bastard," Darcy would holler at his boss, with the easy familiarity of a fellow displaced Brooklynite, often in full hearing range of his customers, "do ya's remember dat' Indian chick with the huge knockers? Used ta' woik' the Deli counter at Feinstein's on E. Park and 42<sup>nd</sup> St.?"

"Oh, ya mean little Parma?" the sweaty Greek would holler back.

"Remembah' har? Jeez pal," he would brag, "do yaz' know how many times I climbed them big mountain peaks?"

And obligingly Darcy would egg him on with, "Yeah, and I bet you camped down in the valley a few times too." But once Stephanopoulos' back was turned, to the delight of the regulars, Darcy would wink, roll his eyes, and dramatically pantomime flagellating himself behind the bar.

But despite Darcy's obvious Irish heritage, an ancestor of his had not set foot in County Cork, or anywhere else in The Emerald Isles since his great-great-great Grandfather had sailed for America at around the time of *The Great Potato Famine*, when eating potatoes in Ireland had gone briefly out of fashion. Along with eating. Period. And no sooner had the ship steamed into the harbor at Elbe Island and dropped anchor than Darcy's ancestor had also dropped the O' in O'Shaughnessy and become simply Shaughnessy. Shortly thereafter his descendents had further anglicized Shaughnessy to Shaw, hoping to differentiate themselves from all the other starving Mc's and O's struggling for refuge in the new country.

But at the moment Darcy was not ruminating on the etymology of his name or on the pedigree of his ancestry. It was getting around 4:00 and time for him to check his inventory in preparation for the evening's bar crowd rush. This included a special collection of oddly shaped whiskey bottles filled with multi-colored powders and potions, a part of the ingredients required for his signature drink, The Celtic Sunset, just in case one of the approximately two locally based devotees of the spectacular concoction should drop in tonight for a drink. It was a dreary overcast Friday evening in early January, and tonight - because there was really nothing in Orlando for non-basketball fans or Disney exiles to do but drink when the weather was bad - he expected a full house.

Darcy's stock of peculiarly shaped liquor bottles, acting like a prism, distorted and separated the light into an amazing spectrum of colors, and standing in front of this spectacular display he caught a glimpse of his own reflection in the full length mirror, thinking that he looked like nothing so much as an aging Harry Potter, doting over his collection of toadstools, dried spiders, hog warts, and what-not.

And although he had never been able to get through any of the books in the series, about the trials and tribulations of a fledgling wizard and his mates at Pig's Foot, or whatever that academy of magic they attended had been called, occasionally, during slack periods at work he had caught bits and pieces of the movies based on the books being played on the TVs over the bar.

“Criminy, I wonder if that kid will ever graduate,” he shouted at the TV set one evening, “and find a job doing whatever it is a graduate wizard does?”

He had seen the long lines queuing up in front of the local Barnes and Noble bookstore on his way in to work that very morning. According to the news they had been forming up since before dawn, awaiting the release of the latest book in the series. Each successive volume apparently chronicled yet another year at school for the aspiring young wizard and his friends. And it seemed to Darcy that at the rate that British dame across the pond was birthing out sequels, young Master Potter should have by now been out of school and absorbed enough instruction in the Black Arts to conjour up some kind of gainful employment for himself.

This was not to say that in any comparison to the erstwhile boy wizard any of the stuff that went into Darcy's Celtic Sunset was dangerous or in any way lethal, despite the amount of preparation required in its pyrotechnic presentation. Most of the basic ingredients, at least those that were still available to him here in Florida, could be found at the corner market. And all of the strange and unusual liqueurs, though mostly imported, had been gotten through his local distributors and could have been ordered by anyone on the Internet. But in the original incarnation of the drink, this had not been entirely the case.

## THE SUNSET OF A CELTIC SON

Darcy had first started putting the drink together back in Brooklyn while he was working as a bartender at a strip club called *The Pink Orchid Gentleman's Emporium* and at the same time struggling to get himself sober; two activities that would seem to most people to be highly contradictory. Indeed, his rehab counselor had strenuously advised against his continuing in his current occupation.

“What else would you have me do?” he had asked. “Tending bar is what I’ve done my whole working life and a bartender is what I’ll always be.” And if one were to consider the passion with which he had made this statement he might as well have been claiming to be a concert pianist.

Darcy had first stumbled, quite literally, upon a mention of the most important ingredient for his drink in a used book store out in Queens located in the cellar of a building at 156<sup>th</sup> St. and 109<sup>th</sup> Ave. He had only wandered in there looking for a place to get some strong coffee while he sat down and tried to figure how he had gotten there - all the way from E. 56<sup>th</sup> St. in East Flatbush where he had started out the night before. But a passage in a little book, a pamphlet really, that he had picked up while he was waiting for his coffee had grabbed his attention. It was all about *The Romantic Poets of the Victorian Era*, and more specifically about their drug-taking and drinking habits, a subject at the time dear to Darcy’s heart.

He had scribbled down a passage on a napkin, attributed in the book only to an anonymous source, that read:

“She got up and went to the cabinet, took out a basketful of withered poppies, and set about making Laudanum. She picked out the poppy heads one by one, pierced the capsules with a sewing needle, and then dropped them into a small glazed crock and set it near the stove for the opium to sweat out...”

And while the neighborhood in which Darcy lived and worked back then was rundown and seedy, it boasted an amazing assortment of ethnic grocery stores and little foreign specialty food shops. In New York City real estate is so precious that every nook and cranny is filled with little businesses catering to every conceivable customer need, many of which are either illegal or probably should be. Supermarket chains are non-existent in New York, that is “in the city” - which to native New Yorkers means Manhattan - and there are virtually no large scale buffets as would be found in any major urban area in the rest of America. Too much waste of space. Upon his return to Brooklyn, Darcy had shown the passage, scribbled on the limp white napkin, to a “Dr.” Wu Lin who owned one of the small shops in the neighborhood. In his native Shanghai, Wu Lin had at one time been both a licensed acupuncturist and a nationally known specialist in herbal medicines and cures. But, since emigrating to the United States he had simply not bothered to become licensed to practice or to dispense anything. Or in his new and far more profitable occupation did he ever intend to be. Besides, there was no governmental licensing agency in the foreseeable future that could, or would, have licensed him considering that most of the ‘prescriptions’ that he administered to his enthusiastic clientèle were proscribed by law. Which was not to say that, in The Big Apple - where nearly anything and practically anyone could be got for a price - his calling was in any way unique. The goods and services in which Wu Lin dealt were also available through any number of other sources in The City - just not any legal ones.

“Laudanum?” Dr. Lin replied, incredulous, as Darcy haltingly read him the passage he had illegibly scratched out the day before through the glaze of a wretched hangover.

“Laudanum not made anymore,” Dr. Lin told him, “mebbe' you mean a' paregoric? Amosa' same thing.”

“Nope. Laudanum,” Darcy said sternly. Although, truth be told, he had absolutely no idea what the difference was, it was just that paregoric didn't sound as romantic as Laudanum had in the little pamphlet he had discovered in the used book store in Queens. So for a moment the two erstwhile entrepreneurs stood staring stubbornly at each other, Dr. Lin looking straight ahead, unblinking, and Darcy gazing moodily over Dr. Lin's shoulder while considering the progress of a large spider climbing up the wall behind him. And the silence that followed was so long and so absolute that the honking of taxicabs and the rumble of the subway could be heard from far off in the distance.

But finally Dr. Lin nodded, slowly and reluctantly, and Darcy knew a deal had been struck.

“But,” Dr. Lin cautioned, “velly expensive.”

And Darcy took this to mean, since as both of them were well aware, he rarely had any money, some form of barter would have to be arranged. So it was likely that at his workplace, The Pink Orchid Gentleman's Emporium, he would be seeing quite a lot of Dr. Lin in the very near future. And so would Lola, Dr. Lin's favorite stripper, as she shimmied and undulated through her nightly dance routine, nervously eyeing Dr. Lin ogling her from a back booth and slurping down complimentary Long Island Ice Teas, courtesy of Darcy and The Pink Orchid. But with the consummation of their deal, Darcy's soon-to-be-famous Celtic Sunset began to really take off in New York City. All of a sudden the mostly male patrons of the little strip bar down on 43<sup>rd</sup> St. and 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. simply could not get enough of it - no surprise to Darcy or to Dr. Lin - and word spread rapidly throughout the city.

In subsequent visits to the little basement bookstore out in Queens, Darcy had begun researching the historical precedent for his bar patrons growing devotion to his drink and to its prime ingredient, Laudanum. What he had learned was that since Victorian times, Laudanum had been a favorite of writers, poets, Royalty, and even otherwise tea-totaling housewives throughout the United Kingdom. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it could have been found in cough syrups and patent medicines and had been prescribed by many a turn-of-the-century physician, not only as a palliative for everything from simple headaches to dyspepsia and tuberculosis, but for many more amorphous maladies as well. "The Blues" for instance, as it was known back then, but what today would be considered a medically serious form of depression. Or the mysterious and deadly malady called "Wasting Away", in the days before much was known about the many faces of Cancer.

But not content to merely emulate the historical successes of his bartending counterparts in England and in the land of his ancestors, Darcy had also hedged his bets. With the help of Dr. Lin, he had sought out and included in his masterpiece the premier liqueur that even well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had inflamed the passions of artists like Picasso and the surrealist Alfred Jarry, impressionists like Vincent van Gogh and Henri Toulouse Lautrec, and the French poets, Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Verlaine along with writers like Edgar Allen Poe, W. Somerset Maugham, and Oscar Wilde. Absinthe.

He had also discovered that no less a literary luminary than Ernest Hemingway had contributed not only the novel, *Death in the Afternoon*, but also an alcoholic concoction by the same name that contained Absinthe, prepared according to the following instructions:

1. Pour one jigger Absinthe into a Champagne glass.
2. Add iced Champagne, until it attains the proper opalescent milkiness.
3. Drink three to five of these slowly.

Regrettably for Darcy's purposes, Absinthe, a distilled licorice-flavored liqueur derived from the wormwood root, had been outlawed in the U.S., at least for sale, since the Titanic sank on its maiden voyage from Southampton, England, to New York.

It was also the namesake of the legendary Old Absinthe House on Bourbon St. in New Orleans, whose version of the drink, at least from 1874 until the advent of Prohibition, had greatly enhanced the fortunes of many a practitioner of Darcy's craft. Darcy's idea had originally been to cash in on a double bounty by incorporating both Laudanum and Absinthe in his own creation, The Celtic Sunset. But in the euphoria of bringing his creation into being, the small fact may have escaped his notice that it was highly illegal to serve either substance, and never mind both together, in any drinking establishment in the continental United States. Though it is doubtful that this would have in any way dissuaded him. With the cavalier abandon of a typical New Yorker he had figured that his admittedly high octane cocktail would be small potatoes for the usually harried and understaffed officers of the local NYPD Precinct, already preoccupied with Heroin smuggling rings, Columbian Cocaine cartels, and almost every other criminal enterprise known to man. And most of these, what Darcy considered 'serious vices', were already available right there on the premises of The Pink Orchid Gentleman's Club to any of the bar's customers who could foot the bill. To Darcy's jaded but in a sense charmingly naïve way of thinking, these more contemporary vices should have totally eclipsed the archaic delights of his drink. Which is not to say that with Dr. Lin's help he had not done everything in his power to remain faithful to the original primary ingredients, thus ensuring their effects, well known by users for over a century, would be the same for his own customers.

But what he had not counted on was that his patronage might include a few members of New York's Finest, often nightly in attendance at The Pink Orchid in varying professional and non-professional capacities. And he had also not calculated in the possibility that a few of the charter members of his little fan club might include a street smart detective or two with a natural occupational interest in the contents of Darcy's drink, and the public resources to satisfy that curiosity.

"Lila, Stephanie, and the new blond with the magnificent hooters..." Det. Sgt. Kominsky was just beginning his nightly lecture at The Pink Orchid for the benefit of his subordinate, Det. Grade 1 Andy Sabicus, by ticking off on the ends of his stubby calloused fingers the names of his favorite practitioners of the art of exotic dance.

"I may not know what's art," he would say, unconsciously rubbing his crotch, "but boob job or not, I know what I like."

Det. Sabicus, who had always heartily concurred with Kominsky's choices and occasionally added a few of his own, stared approvingly up at the girls from his seat at a front row table as he sucked on a Light beer while they danced on the bar top and slid up and down the shiny brass poles that lined the room. But it was not only for consensus regarding the charms of the dancers that he and his partner had kept coming back to The Pink Orchid, even on those nights when Duty had not demanded it. And of course Duty never had. Or would. Kominsky and Sabicus were Manhattan cops and this was Brooklyn, a few hundred city blocks removed from their jurisdiction. Except on those rare occasions when Brooklyn Central might request backup from their Precinct. Like in the event of a Martian invasion.

On any given night Kominsky could be found at The Pink Orchid, and on many of these occasions he had dragged along a not-very-violently protesting Det. Sabicus, even though as they both knew, frequenting strip clubs during off-duty hours, and especially those outside of Manhattan in Brooklyn, was what was referred to around the 7th Precinct as "pissing in your own sandbox." Although the less descriptive but official title for it was "engaging in unsanctioned inter-jurisdictional extra-curricular



activities". In any case it was a surefire way to attract the attention of authority figures in the department who made a hobby out of jotting down cryptic derogatory notations in the margins of their subordinates' personnel folders. And as it had already been carefully noted in Kominsky's case, many of his forays out to the perimeters of New York's popular titillation districts had not always been confined to off-duty hours.

And on this particular drizzly August afternoon, Kominsky sat moodily at his desk dreading the six hours still left on his shift, "and that is only if some nasty shit doesn't go down in the district tonight," he thought.

But if he had been concentrating on his work instead of dreamily fantasizing about how good one of Darcy Shaw's festively bubbly Celtic Sunsets would have tasted at the moment, he should have been jotting down notes regarding the connection between Pedro Guadalupe, the current 5<sup>th</sup> Ward City Councilman, and a grease ball stool pigeon by the name of Larry Lunsfeld. The Wilkins Case was a decades old thoroughly unappetizing pastiche of drugs, prostitution, and murder; a Vice/Homicide overlap really that only that morning had again been dumped on Det. Kominsky's desk.

"Larry The Soprano", as Lunsfeld was known on the streets of Manhattan these days, had toured briefly with The Metropolitan Opera Company back in his glory days some 25 years past, but more recently was looking at a 25-to-Life stretch for "Possession of Narcotics With Intent to Sell". As a result he was again in rare voice, ready to sing arias in four octaves about Guadalupe's involvement in the Wilkin's murder, all to the tune of "Let's Make a Deal".

Back in the day, the Wilkins murder trial had been all the rage, with an article a day on the front page of *The New York Times*, a full photo spread in *The New York Post*, and regular reports of the ongoing investigation on the radio and the evening TV news. But back then about all the Police had known was that Lunsfeld and Guadalupe had formed a *ménage à trois* of sorts with a black sometime call-girl by the name of Dara Lee Wilkins, who before her untimely demise had coincidentally been working as a receptionist in Guadalupe's law office. Police investigators had always suspected Guadalupe in the beating death of Dara Lee, but no hard evidence had ever been found to implicate him, or for that matter Lunsfeld either. And now, a quarter of a century later, Lunsfeld's testimony could be the break that Prosecutors had been waiting for all these years.

But the only break that Det. Sgt. Kominsky was contemplating at the moment was a liquid lunch break across town at his favorite jiggle-and-grind, The Pink Orchid, even though it was only 11:00 in the morning. It was also not inconceivable that this might include a few of Darcy Shaw's delectably delicious and strangely addictive Celtic Sunsets.

"They help me focus on my work is all," he explained to his partner, Andy, who just looked skeptically back at him without comment.

But when Kominsky invited him along on yet another mid-afternoon junket to Brooklyn, he amicably declined saying, "Naw, Sarge, you go ahead, I'll cover for you. Anyway I've got to get this stuff down to the lab this morning."

And it was at exactly that moment, as he was starting down the stairs to the Crime Lab in the basement of the Precinct, that Det. Sabicus got his big idea.

"Hey, Sarge," he said, turning back to Kominsky, who had just grabbed his coat and was padding slowly toward the door, "maybe you could bring me one of those drinks back with you. You know, for later I mean."

Kominsky looked back at him with an odd, slightly confused look on his face, but nodded in agreement. Because he knew that Sabicus never drank on duty or during working hours, and even after that rarely anything stronger than a Light beer or two. On a few of their previous visits to The Pink Orchid, Sabicus had even gone so far as to lecture him on his drinking habits, reminding him that when the bust came down he didn't want a partner who showed up loaded in any other sense than with a loaded 9mm.

“Stop bustin' my fuckin' chops, Detective,” Kominsky had told him, “I'm here on official business.”

And it was true that on occasion Kominsky had gone by the bar after closing time and rattled a few doors. And the alcohol fueled brawls that regularly broke out over the girls had never happened on Kominsky's watch, even when he was in nearly the same drunken state as the would-be combatants. But there had also been complaints from the management regarding the copious amounts of free booze that Darcy had been regularly dispensing to the Sargeant.

On one particular evening the owner of The Pink Orchid, a local mob dilettante, had complained loudly to Darcy within Kominsky's hearing about the little Police Benevolent Association he had been running from behind the bar.

“For services rendered,” Darcy explained to his boss.

And from way down at the other end of the bar, Kominsky had hastened to add:

“Yeah, and for not bustin' your balls about the boatload of Criminal and Civil Code violations that go on nightly in this joint.”

And at exactly that moment, as if on cue, a huge cockroach scuttled out from beneath the bar. Which Kominsky, reacting quickly, was just able to squash with the heel of his boot, saying, “Not to mention the long list of Health Code violations.”

But on one of these nights a drunken Kominsky had finally badgered his partner, Sabicus, into taking a sip of Darcy's signature drink, The Celtic Sunset, the preparation for which resembled the pyrotechnic segment of the half-time show at last year's Super Bowl. And just now, sitting at his desk, when he had only indirectly mentioned the drink to Kominsky, Andy had felt a familiar tingling in his extremities that since that first sip had been accompanied by a sudden warm rush of blood through his veins he found both exhilarating and at the same time a little disturbing.

One morning, about a week later, as Darcy was busily stocking the beer cooler at The Pink Orchid, he looked up surprised to see a man standing at the end of the bar, even though the club was not yet open for the day and only Darcy and a private security guard were on the premises. The mystery of how the fellow had gotten past the guard was soon cleared up. Striding confidently toward Darcy he had flashed a Gold *NYPD Detective Investigator* shield with his name and picture attached. Which, as it turned out, had not really been necessary. Darcy had immediately recognized him, the instant his reflection had come into view in the full length mirror behind the bar, as one of the cops who with his partner occasionally frequented the club. And not only was his face familiar but Darcy had seen it recently on a TV news segment. While the sound on the TV had been turned down at the request of a drunken customer who was busily plunking quarters into the juke box between lap dances, a banner at the bottom of the screen had read:

FIFTH WARD COUNCILMAN INDICTED IN 25-YEAR-OLD MURDER CASE

At the press conference shown in the accompanying news clip, the man who now stood before him had

been standing then with his partner next to the Chief of Police and behind the State's Attorney. Darcy had momentarily forgotten the man's name - it had been flashed only briefly on the TV screen - but he could now read it clearly on the badge that at this moment was being shoved in his face.

Andrew Michael Sabicus  
Detective-Investigator 1<sup>st</sup> Class  
Seventh Precinct Detective Division NYPD

Detective Sabicus, he now vaguely recalled, had visited The Pink Orchid a number of times with his partner, Detective Sargeant Kominsky, whom Darcy knew well - not only as a regular customer but also as a devoted fan of his own becoming-increasingly-famous drink, The Celtic Sunset. But he remembered that, unlike his partner, Detective Investigator Sabicus had never been an especially big tippler. Like any accomplished bartender, Darcy tended to remember his customers not by their names but by what they customarily drank. Det. Sabicus was invariably a Corona Light with a twist of lime. On the other hand, his partner, Kominsky, was suds and a shot followed by a Celtic Sunset with a soda back. And in recognition of the generous tips he customarily doled out to the dancers - often in the neighborhood of hundreds of dollars in \$1's and \$5's that he enthusiastically stuffed into their G-Strings throughout the night - he had earned the nickname "Detective Daddy Warbucks". In contrast, Detective Sabicus was known as "The Stiff". The girls frequently complained to Darcy that not only had he never left any more than a few singles under his usual end-of-the-evening coffee cup, but in anyone's living memory he had never requested a lap dance.

But on this particular morning Detective Sabicus had a tip for Darcy that he would not soon forget.

"I had the lab boys run a few tests on that drink of yours," he said by way of introduction.

"It's called a Celtic Sunset," Darcy said helpfully, interrupting him.

"Oh, I know what it's called," the Detective answered, "and now that I also know what's in it, I can see why it's so popular with your customers. Including, I have to admit, myself and my partner, Sargeant Kominsky."

"I'm glad you like it," Darcy said, trying to sound cheerful, wondering uncomfortably what was coming next.

And at that Detective Sabicus began reading from a long list of ingredients that seemed to Darcy to have magically appeared in his hands and that the lab technicians down at the station had discovered and listed in their report,

"Tincture of opium is, I believe, the *active* ingredient," he said, "otherwise known as *morphine*, and in its prescription form, *paregoric*. But, I'm guessing that your boy, whomever is getting you the stuff" he said, holding his hand theatrically to his mouth and whispering softly in Darcy's ear, "is not a licensed physician."

All of this was of course old news to Darcy, but nevertheless he continued to play along, even at one point nearly blurting out "Laudanum", when the Detective had become stumped on the name of the ingredient that dissolved in alcohol had been sold historically as patent medicine. Thankfully he had caught himself before the word came tumbling out of his mouth, just as Detective Sabicus was expounding on the fact that Darcy had not been the first bartender in history who had thought to put it in a drink.

“But apparently your version packs a double whammy,” Sabicus said conversationally, and reading again from the lab report, continued with, “Absinthe, a licorice flavored liqueur, containing a reportedly hallucinogenic substance derived from wormwood, a root.”

“You ever been to New Orleans, my friend?” he asked.

Trying to look clueless, Darcy continued to stare silently ahead.

Winking conspiratorially at Darcy while feigning disappointment at his lack of response, the Detective prodded. “Aw, come on, you know, The Old Absinthe House on Bourbon St.” he said as if they were old drinking buddies - which in a sense they were.

“These days you just can't get the real thing anymore, can you? At least not in New Orleans, anyway.” And he began again to read from the paper in his hand, that Darcy noticed included the notation “EVIDENCE” stamped in bright red letters across the top.

“Oh, and the lab boys also found good old Irish Whiskey, plus a few more well, comparatively benign ingredients, including a syrup made from pomegranate seeds popularly known, I think, as *Grenadine*, and what appears to be *Crème de Menthe*, that among other things might account for the greenish tint of the drink.” And here he pointed to two bottles on a shelf above Darcy's head, one that was filled with a red liquid and the other green.

At this point Darcy had opened his mouth to protest, but the Detective quickly raised his hand and with an upraised finger indicated that he was not yet finished.

“Add some tropical fruits, kiwis, mangoes, and bananas, a little carbonation, and *flambé* the entire concoction. Voila! There you have it: A Celtic Sunset.”

“Oh, wait,” he said, consulting his report, “there are also a few as yet unidentified spices and some even more exotic ingredients the lab boys think may be of African origin. But I guess I'll have to get back to you on that.”

While it may have been true that not much of a case could be made for the beneficial effects of opium in anything but a medical setting, before the Detective had cut him off Darcy had nearly countered with: “But it has never been conclusively proved that Absinthe has any long-term deleterious effect on its users.”

Wisely, after the Detective had finished speaking, and before incriminating himself, he had managed to “hold that thought”. Anyway his point would have probably been lost on Detective Sabicus, and as a closing argument for his defense attorney might have sounded irrelevant to a judge and jury of his peers. While Darcy may have been able to show that Absinthe had never been illegal, at least technically, to possess or to drink, it was still a felony for any commercial establishment in the U.S. to import and serve it. Never mind that for several years now, here at The Pink Orchid Gentleman's Emporium, like a drugstore soda fountain jerk dispensing Cherry Colas, Darcy had been serving up a drink to his customers that contained both substances, Laudanum and Absinthe.

“So you can see why my partner and I will be jumping off this little excursion train of yours at the next stop,” Detective Sabicus was saying, leaning in so close to Darcy that their noses were almost touching, “along with all the rest of your other addicted passengers.”

And neither of them blinked as, looking Darcy straight in the eye, he concluded with: “While I ain't no fortune cookie, I think I can see trains in your future too.”

And with that he walked the length of the bar and turned on his heel, exiting by the door through which he had entered, only adding over his shoulder:

“If you get my meaning.”

Darcy did, and by that very afternoon he had booked a seat on the midnight Amtrak train; going anywhere. But mostly South, as far from New York City as he could get. That night, after closing the bar for the last time, he dropped the keys in the cash register, and with barely enough time left to grab a few clothes from his apartment, fled the city that had been his home for his entire life, not even stopping long enough to collect a last paycheck that was owed him. By the next evening, as the sun set over Key West, he was standing on a giant buoy that marked the Southernmost part of the U.S., while a passing tourist that he had conscripted snapped a picture of him, waving at the camera as if he were about to jump off the pier and swim the 60 miles across The Florida Straits to Cuba.

Weeks later, when he had finally gotten the picture developed, sadly, he couldn't for the life of him think of anyone to send it to.