

## *44. Bombay Peggy's and the Sourtoe Cocktail*

Things didn't sound quite right at the Pelly Crossing filling station in the middle of the Yukon Territory. The gurgle of the fuel I was pumping down the filler neck had a frothy note, reminiscent of the sound of filling up one of the diesel pick-ups I've owned over the years.

I smelled the nozzle before I hung it up and, at precisely the instant my nose processed the 'Diesel-you-idiot' warning, my eyes focused on the word DIESEL on the fuel pump.

To say I felt stupid was an understatement. The gasoline-powered Chevy Blazer I'd rented in Whitehorse obviously would have to have its tank drained and the delay would cut the heart out of the six hours of daylight that mid-December offered at this latitude. It might even disrupt overnight plans at Bombay Peggy's, a renovated former



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brothel in Dawson City, where Lisa had reserved the Lipstick Room.

“There’s a silver lining though,” I tried to be upbeat, as I confessed the fueling blunder to Lisa. “It’s Friday the 13th and this should be enough of a screw-up for clear sailing at Bombay Peggy’s along with my quest to be ordained into Captain Dick’s Sourtoe Cocktail Club.”

Lisa realized how sheepish I felt. The affable lady at the service station told me lots of people had filled their gasoline cars with diesel fuel there. Her boyfriend David had the day off and could be on the scene in a few minutes. He had helped out some of the other ‘fuel losers’ here on the Klondike Highway between Whitehorse and Dawson City, just south of the Arctic Circle.

David arrived and after two hours of coaxing, we managed to siphon most of the fuel out of the tank. We refilled with gasoline and headed out into the afternoon twilight.

We arrived in Dawson City, a town of 1,900 people that was once the largest city west of Winnipeg and north of San Francisco. Bombay Peggy’s turned out to be a lovingly restored Inn that had once been a bustling bordello. After 535 kilometres of icy roads, snow squalls and the diesel fuel fiasco, the friendly hosts and lush appointments of the Lipstick Room were welcome.

After an hour of rest, the Sourtoe Cocktail beckoned so we left the cozy hotel and moseyed across town to the Sourdough Saloon

*Owners Wendy Cairns and Kim Bouzaine breathed new life into an old brothel.*

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# Driven Mind



*I stared at it for a long time before making my move.*

located in the Downtown Hotel. The streets were deserted. The lonely sound of our boots on the wooden sidewalks reminded me of a cattle rustler heading to the gallows in a 1950s western movie. What had I gotten myself into with this Sourtoe Cocktail?

The Sourdough Saloon wasn't much livelier than the wintry streets of Dawson City. Three locals sat at a table hunched over glasses of draught beer. Lisa and I approached the rustic bar a few stools down from the only other patrons, a grizzled couple whispering sweet nothings to each other.

"What would you like?" asked Donna Nickerson, the chatty bartender.

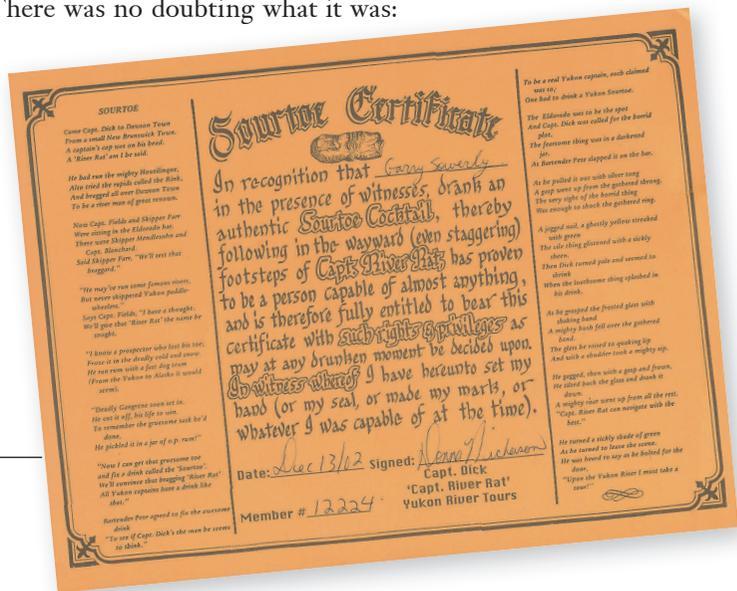
"We came for the toe," Lisa replied. The locals looked up from their drinks.

"The toe or the full foot?" Donna went on to explain that the full foot consisted of 5 toes rather than just one big toe.

"Just the toe."

I felt a lump in my throat and considered bolting back to the comfort of the Lipstick Room. Donna produced a small crock, undid two metal fasteners and pulled the top off, revealing a mound of coarse salt.

"Now I gotta dig for it," she said with a smirk. There was no doubting what it was:



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a hefty-sized big toe, nail and all. My stomach heaved as Donna explained that the drink I chose should not have any ice in it. I wondered if the toe would sink or float. When she plopped it into a glass of water to rinse off the salt, I averted my eyes.

“After I put it into your cocktail, I have to see the toe rubbing against your lips as you drink.” She seemed to enjoy the ritual.

My last thought before imbibing was to wonder if it was poisonous, but surely I would have heard about Sourtoe casualties on Fox News or seen bizarre headlines splattered across the front cover of a National Enquirer at a supermarket checkout somewhere.

I tipped the drink back and eventually felt the grotesque digit rub against my top lip. The more I drank, the more toe pressure I felt.

“No one can take it from me now,” I thought as Donna declared me “Sourtoed”. I thought I heard a sole handclap. It was over. What taboos had I violated?

On the walk back to Bombay Peggy's, I examined the authentication certificate Donna had presented me. I was Club Member #12,224. There was a web site ([www.sourtoecocktailclub.com](http://www.sourtoecocktailclub.com)) where non-believers could get more information. I smiled to myself thinking that kissing a cod in Newfoundland had nothing on this Yukon ritual.

My mind drifted to the cozy Lipstick Room just as Lisa assured me my toe-touching lips were not high on her list of priorities. I slipped my arm around her shoulder trying to warm things up.

“Your sleeve smells like diesel fuel,” she muttered.

I looked at my watch. Ten-fifteen. It was still Friday the 13th.

