

CONSTANTIA SOTERIOU

BRANDY SOUR

Translation from Greek by Lina Protopapa

BRANDY SOUR: THE KING

They say that a barman invented the cocktail for King Farouk of Egypt in the 1940s — a dark time for the king, who is already grown and in trouble, who is no longer the handsome athletic boy charming Europe with his Western manners, but a heavy middle-aged man faced with all kinds of political headaches in Egypt and elsewhere too who has to conceal his fondness for alcohol. They say that he had come to Cyprus for a break after a trip to England; that he stayed in Platres, the island's most cosmopolitan village; and that he lodged in the only hotel that could possibly host him: the Forest Park. They say that he only stayed in the village for a single night, just time enough for him to compose himself. They say that he had booked an entire hotel floor and that he had shut himself off in the room for hours and hours, eating and drinking — as he always did — and smoking too. They say that what keeps you awake at night in Platres are the nightingales, but what keeps Farouk awake are the problems back in his country; his breakup with Farida, who gives him nothing but daughters; the English and the French, who keep extending their greedy hands all over Egypt; his belly, which keeps growing bigger and bigger. They say that he was spotted opening the window that night and breathing in the sweet smells of the village — the lavender and the perfume of the ancient pine trees that cover the long Troodos mountain range and reach all the way down to the village — and the chill of the night that carries the secrets of the world. They say that he'd had a rough day, that he had previously met with the island's English governor and that they had gotten into an argument. The crisis that will lead him away from the monarchy is only a few years away. The death of him. Farouk is tired. They say that with his head heavy from all the food and the politics, he'd left his attendants in the room and gone to the bar, incognito. They say that he had sat at the hotel bar alone and that he had asked the barman to fix him something. 'Fix me something,' said Farouk to the barman, 'fix me something to drink that doesn't look like a drink, fix me something that doesn't look like it contains alcohol, fix me something that isn't what it seems, put a bit of that good cognac of yours that I like so much, oh, and add some lemon, too — I like your lemons.'

It's true what he said about our lemons, we have good lemons.

The man behind the bar listened to Farouk sympathetically and poured all his mastery into a drink worthy of kings who want to deceive people: he added cognac to help the king forget and lemonade for sweetness, but also sour lemons to remind the king of his sorrows and Angostura bitters to heighten the bitterness, and he poured it all into a highball glass so the drink would resemble an iced tea. 'Here you go!' Before you fill the glass with all the ingredients, you must first sugar its rim. And, lastly, you must top it all off with a sweet little cherry. A maraschino.

King Farouk tastes the drink the barman makes for him and he sighs. He likes its sweetness and its sourness, and he likes how it leaves a bitter aftertaste on his tongue that reminds him of Egypt. He sits at the bar and talks to the man who had fixed his drink for hours. The crisis that will lead him

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away from the monarchy is only a few years away. The death of him. Everything seems distant this evening, with the drink that sweetens him and leaves a bitter aftertaste in his mouth. When he leaves the island the following morning, he takes with him fourteen okkas of halloumi, twenty-one okkas of sour cherry jam, three okkas of lavender tea, and two okkas of that Damascus rose lotion that soothes his skin after the harsh sun, seven bottles of Commandaria, and the complaints of the employees, to whom he had left not one cent in tips. Despite the pressure, the barman refuses to give him the recipe of the drink he had created because of him. Farouk leaves with his luggage packed with everything but the secret recipe of the cocktail, the one made especially for him, the one made for people who want to deceive. The barman will take the secret recipe along with Farouk's secrets to his new job, to the new Big Hotel that will sprout in the island's capital shortly thereafter. This is the new drink that he will serve in the cool verandas, in nice highball glasses, full of secrets and brandy and lemonade. Cyprus has good lemons.

It's a good drink, brandy sour. They say that King Farouk liked it a lot. It's a Cypriot drink that the barman will subsequently make famous, that he will serve to actresses and cosmonauts and kings and guerrillas in the Big Hotel that will later appear. It's a Cypriot drink with ingredients from our island that you serve in a tall glass after you sugar its rim, a drink full of cognac and lemonade that seems and tastes innocent, but is not. It's a drink worthy of kings who want to deceive people, a drink that isn't what it seems to be, that looks like iced tea and that you can drink publicly without anyone knowing what it contains. It's a drink full of secrets — that's why it was made here. Cognac, lemons, and Angostura to make you bitter — it's not a brandy sour if it doesn't make you bitter.

Brandy sour:

In a highball glass.

1 part cognac

2-3 drops of Angostura bitters

Lemonade

Sour lemons

Soda water

1 glazed cherry on a toothpick

We rim the glass with sugar.

We decorate with a slice of lemon and the cherry and we offer it to the king.