

Chapter 17

Greetings, my friend. Here, let me help you with that crate,” Paolo suggested, as Weylin entered the trattoria before the evening onslaught.

“Just a token of my appreciation for all you’ve done for me,” Weylin replied, as he placed the box of McCain Cabernet on a nearby table and shook Paolo’s extended hand.

“Oh, you are too generous but how can I refuse,” Paolo said, already in the process of opening the wooden case. “Have you had dinner?”

“No.”

“Good, then tonight, you will be my guest. Come, I will show you to our table and arrange for something special.”

Paolo removed two bottles from the crate and placed them in the center of their table while signaling a nearby waiter to carry the remainder into a storeroom. He disappeared, returned two minutes later with a corkscrew and sat down opposite Weylin. Lifting one of the bottles and holding it before his eyes, he nodded in approval. “Most impressive label,” he

remarked, "I am anxious to try it, shall we open it now?"

"By all means," Weylin said, with a big grin, secretly hoping to impress him.

Paolo poured a small amount into a very thin, yet tall crystal wine glass. He swirled the dark red liquid within the glass, gingerly bringing its rim to his nose. His eyebrows arched in appreciation but after tasting a small amount his jaw dropped. "I had heard that the Camalia Cabernet was a marvel to behold," he said, "but I had my doubts, since it was only available to the regional hospitals. This, my friend," he added, while gesturing with his glass, "is an Italian jewel with no regional equal."

Weylin was beside himself with pride. "Thank you for the complement," he said, while thinking, I only hope the recognized wine experts have the same opinion.

"Dr. McCain ..."

"Call me Weylin, please."

"Weylin, will you permit me to purchase some for my own use and perhaps a few of my very best customers?"

"Of course, but bear in mind that our production is relatively small, I don't know how much will be available."

During dinner, conversation drifted in the direction of business and the availability of qualified personnel. "I'm looking for someone with winery experience to act as my liaison," Weylin said, "do you have any suggestions?"

Paolo, with a mouthful of a colorful dessert called *Zuppa Ingles* swallowed hard and coughed. "I know of many people who would love to have that job," he said, "but not a single one has experience."

The dinner ended with Paolo being called to the kitchen to deal with a small fire caused by his careless young son. At that moment, Weylin made a decision to hire Alberto Capelli, assuming he agreed to the terms.

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Weylin drove his Alpha into the vineyard parking lot at eight-thirty the next morning, heading straight for the parking space nearest the entrance. To his dismay, however, it was already occupied. More curious than angry, he approached the winery manager who stood near an espresso machine located opposite the front door. “Who owns that black Lancia?” he inquired.

Sheepishly, the manager lowered his cup and turned. “I told Signore Capelli that you wish to speak to him.”

“Where is he now?”

“In your office,” he replied, with a pained expression.

After taking a deep breath, Weylin slowly approached the office while wondering if he’d made the right decision. He stood briefly at the open doorway, watching Capelli stare out of the window towards the vineyard. Clearing his throat to announce his presence, he entered. “Mr. Capelli, how nice to see you again,” he said.

Capelli, looking a bit disoriented, turned and smiled. “I hope you don’t mind,” he said, “I always enjoyed the view from this window.”

“Not at all, have a seat,” he said, while pointing to the only other chair in the room

aside from the one he approached behind the desk.

Frowning, Capelli walked around to the front of the desk and sat down. “It seems a bit strange to be on this side.” he said.

“Oddly enough, that is exactly what I would like to discuss.”

After a lengthy conversation, Capelli agreed to the terms set forth by Weylin but added two provisos. “I understand that I will not be given the title of president,” he said, “but in Italy, titles are important for many reasons.”

Weylin, clicking the mechanism of a ballpoint pen, hesitated for a moment, then nodded in agreement. “How would you feel with the title of Direttore of McCain Vineyard?”

“Excellent, it commands the degree of respect required by my position but, I do have one other request.”

“That is?”

“The parking space?”

Unable to suppress a chuckle, Weylin laughed uncontrollably but quickly regained his composure. “Alright, the first space is yours as long as I am not in town. In addition, you will need an office. Since you are no longer the president, using this room would send the wrong message to the other managers. There is a nice, large, apparently unused room on the opposite side of the entrance. You may renovate and furnish it as you please, within reason, however.”

They shook hands and Capelli left the office with the work list previously compiled by Weylin.

The rest of the week was uneventful. Weylin had called Armond, the wine distributor, several times, hoping that he had received the shipment of McCain Cabernet but he had not. The entire distribution strategy depended upon a favorable opinion from both Armond and his chosen expert. Following his last call, Weylin sat by the phone rationalizing that if the wine had to sit in the storage room for a period of time, it could only help its quality by prolonging the aging process, on the other hand, he admitted to himself, it would be nice to see some cash rolling in.

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Damn, it's Friday already, Weylin remarked to himself, as he punched the Alpha's accelerator on the way back to the castle, realizing that Svetlana was due to arrive in the morning. With his excitement building, the thought of having dinner alone in the romantic hotel wasn't the least bit appealing and with his fondness for Paolo's food and company, the decision had been made. Following a quick shower and a change of clothes in his ornate suite, he headed for Pisa and the trattoria della Quaglia.

It was eight-thirty by the time Weylin arrived at the restaurant; the busiest night of the week. Not a single table remained empty. Walking towards the kitchen, overcome by a symphony of aromas, Weylin's hunger had reached a feverous pitch. Just then, Paolo emerged, took him by the arm while scanning the room, then guided him into the kitchen. "Friday is our most crowded evening," he announced. "The men leave their wives at home, come here for dinner and then visit their mistresses."

“Are you serious?” Weylin said.

“Yes, it is almost a tradition but come, there is a table in the back of the kitchen that I reserve for myself and family. Tonight it is yours.”

“Will you join me?” Weylin asked, hoping for some friendly conversation and a bit of local color.

Paolo glanced at a wall clock. “A quick dinner, yes? I must help the ladies here in the kitchen.”

The food was delivered and removed from the table with such speed that Weylin hardly had the time to finish anything. The sheer quantity, however, more than adequately quenched his hunger. Over a double espresso, Paolo leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling. “The Cabernet was a big hit, it is all gone.”

“The whole case, already?” Weylin said, totally surprised.

“I drank most of it—it’s terribly addictive, you know; it is that good. I would like to purchase more if possible.”

Weylin nervously scratched the palm of his hand, realizing that he had just received his first order. “Of course,” he said, “how much do you need?”

“Three or four cases, that is, if I can afford them,” he said, with a pouty expression.

“You have me at a slight disadvantage. With all the restructuring occurring at the winery, I have assigned the pricing responsibility to my director. I will have him contact you next week.”

“Good.”

Just then, the sound of two women shouting at each other made conversation

impossible. Paolo looked at the two, who were pointing at each other and screaming, and with an apologetic expression turned to face Weylin. "I'm afraid I must go now and separate those two," he said, "this happens all of the time."

"Employees?" Weylin asked.

"No, my mother and mother-in-law," he replied, quickly rising from his chair as the two women faced off, each with a raised soup ladle.

That's my cue, Weylin said to himself, as he carefully stepped around the howling trio and made his way to the exit.

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The wake up call came early as requested. Weylin looked at the clock and figured that he had enough time for a quick shower and breakfast before pointing the Alpha in the direction of Pisa's airport.

At ten o'clock in the morning, he parked and walked into the main arrivals building and awaited Svetlana's flight. He was about to take a seat when he noticed a familiar form bending towards a suitcase, facing away from him. He approached and, inserting his left forearm under her right, spun her around to face him while holding a dozen red roses with his other hand.

"Weylin, you have borrowed my technique without my permission," Svetlana joked, as she kissed him firmly on the lips, almost crushing the roses between their bodies.

"I have waited patiently the entire week in anticipation of your arrival," he announced.

After a passionate kiss, Svetlana, with tears in her eyes, withdrew and smiled. “These roses are beautiful, how thoughtful,” she said.

“They reminded me of you but I have another surprise.”

“Surprise?” she said, with the affect of an excited child.

“A castle, the Castello di Magona, to be more specific,” he said, while lifting her bag and leading off in the direction of the car.