

Chapter 19

This is the second time I've left her in Italy, Weylin remarked to himself, while sitting in an Alitalia business class seat awaiting takeoff. I hope she forgives me. Ugh, and Sascha, I don't look forward to that conversation.

The flight arrived at Newark International at twelve noon, local time. Having called ahead, the Condor limousine awaited his arrival and at his request, took him directly to the office. Sprinting from the elevator, he stopped briefly at Martha's desk.

"You're back, so soon?" she exclaimed, with a shocked expression.

"Well, it seems that a problem has developed that couldn't wait," he replied.

"Oh yes, I heard some shouting the other day. It sounded like Mr. Dobbs chastising one of the VP's."

"Bring me a mug of coffee," he requested, sullenly, "while I sort things out. One other thing, get the legal department on the line."

Martha followed from behind carrying a coffee pot and filled the covered mug that sat

waiting on his desk. “Thank you,” he said, while drumming his fingers on the desk pad.

“Right, legal department,” she blurted, quickly departing the office with a wounded expression.

One minute later, the intercom crackled. “Legal on two.”

Without giving the attorney a chance to say a single word, Weylin began with his tirade. “Look,” he said, angrily, “I’ve just arrived from the airport, having cut short my Italian vacation by almost one week. Couldn’t you guys have dealt with that wacko antiabortion group?”

“Well, sir, you allegedly made a promise that we couldn’t keep.”

“Couldn’t you have stalled them until my scheduled return?”

“Their legal representative claims that they have lived up to their end of the bargain. He left a lingering threat of another much larger demonstration than the last, unless you perform as promised.”

“Perform as promised?” he repeated, while audibly exhaling. “Alright, I’ll see what I can do with the board. Sorry for the attack.”

With the receiver still to his ear he buzzed the outer office. “Martha, see if you can locate Mr. Dobbs, I need to speak to him right away.”

I’m back for ten minutes, he said to himself, and it’s like I never left. Well, some good may come out of this. He dialed Armond’s office. “Armond, it’s Weylin McCain. I’m back in New Jersey.”

“I knew you wouldn’t pass up the exposition,” Armond replied.

“Well, there were other reasons for my return, however, do you have enough left from

the case to make a reasonable showing?”

“I have eight bottles, it’ll do.”

“There are five hundred cases at the winery in Bolgheri, although, a small part of it has been committed to locals.”

“The review article has already been written but won’t hit the street until next month. Since it is very favorable, I’ve convinced the publisher to provide me with advance copies. Once the buyers have sampled the wine and read the review, the lot will be gone.”

“You talked about premium pricing?”

“I believe the quality calls for it but before I give you the number that I have in mind, I want the exclusive distribution rights for the northeastern states.”

Given Armond’s reputation for stocking only the finest of wines, Weylin did not hesitate. “Agreed.”

“Good, your word will suffice until a proper document can be executed.”

A per bottle price was agreed upon that exceeded Weylin’s expectations, raising his hopes for the winery’s profitability. He hung up, with visions of wine collectors vying for the pleasure of displaying a bottle of McCain Cabernet in their cellars. The daydream, interrupted by the buzzing intercom, was unfortunately short lived.

“Mr. Dobbs on line one,” Martha announced.

He took a deep breath, whispered an expletive under his breath and lifted the receiver. “Good afternoon, Franklin,” he said. “I cut my vacation short to deal with this antiabortion issue. Can’t we arrive at some form of compromise?”

“If you recall, it was my suggestion to remove the abortion pill after the last

demonstration ...”

“Delta 6,” Weylin quickly corrected.

“Alright, Delta 6,” he acquiesced, with audible anger. “But this stuff is causing our image more problems than it’s worth.”

“Not according to the sales department. It was our third biggest profit generator as of last month.”

“OK, OK, what kind of compromise had you in mind?”

“All they want is a chance to present their case. If you could assemble a few of the board members to hear them out, I think we could put this to bed for the time being.”

“What do you mean, time being?”

“They will undoubtedly want us to pull the drug from the market but we need the profits from Delta 6. We’re not pulling it.”

“So, it is your opinion that they will come back at us another day?”

“Maybe.”

“OK, I’ll make the arrangements but if it backfires, the board will seriously reconsider its trust in your judgment.”

“That guy is constantly threatening me,” he grumbled, as he lowered the receiver.

Glancing at the pile of paperwork that had accumulated on his desk since his departure, he frowned, rose and walked directly to Martha’s desk. “Call the limo driver and tell him I’m on my way,” he said to Martha, whose popcorn filled mouth stifled her attempted response.

The chauffeur deposited his baggage with the condo's concierge while Weylin rode the elevator to his penthouse. He strode into the bedroom, took a quick shower and then sat before the answering machine to review the week's messages. One in particular caught his attention: *Weylin, this is Paolo from the trattoria. I wish to thank you for the wine shipment, it arrived today. Signore Capelli was most accommodating.* Looking at his watch and calculating the time difference, he lifted the receiver and dialed the international number. A young male voice responded after ten rings. "Pronto?"

"This is Weylin McCain calling from New Jersey, is your father available?"

The young man's mastery of the English language had improved marginally since his last conversation. "He is not here," he said. "He go to hospital--sick friend, call later."

"Thank you."

The housekeeper, unaware of his premature return, had not left her usual precooked meal and after checking the freezer, he resolved to have something delivered. Forty minutes later, while seated in the living room watching the news and eating, a comical thought arose; I just returned from Italy and here I am eating pizza.

He had made a mental note to try Paolo once again at eleven o'clock but at ten-thirty, the phone rang. "Hello?" he said.

"It is Paolo; sorry I missed your call."

"I was surprised to receive your message. How did you manage to have the wine

delivered so quickly?”

“Mr. Capelli said that you described me as a friend. He arranged to have a worker deliver the three cases on his way home. They came yesterday.”

“Your son said you were at the hospital? I hope your friend is well.”

There was a brief moment of silence followed by an audible sigh. “He did not survive,” he bemoaned.

Weylin’s medical curiosity got the better of him. “What happened to him?” he asked.

“He was having dinner here last night, drinking wine, your wine in fact, and thoroughly enjoying it, when he suddenly complained of dizziness, trouble breathing and then fainted.”

“Did he have heart disease?”

“I do not know, he was only fifty but the doctor thought that he might. When the ambulance arrived, he was not breathing. They had to make him breathe artificially. He never woke up.”

“I’m sorry to hear that and I apologize for not saying good-bye before I left, but I had to leave unexpectedly to deal with a problem here in New Jersey.”

“Do not be concerned. Keep in touch.”

The remainder of the week was filled with the usual day-to-day tasks that Weylin had long become accustomed to. Relief from the tedium came, however, with the onset of Friday's wine exposition. Weylin took the day off from Condor and assumed his place beside Armond.

Representatives from most of the region's wine distributors and, more importantly, restaurants and private collectors attended. Armond had his own booth at the convention hall. Although his display contained a host of selections, McCain Cabernet occupied the most prominent position. Weylin remained glued to the booth for the better part of the morning and by noontime, he turned to Armond with a expression of disappointment. "There have been a lot of lookers and tasters but no buyers. Have we overpriced it?"

Armond nodded in disagreement. "None of the bona fides will appear before the lunch hour," he explained. "Just wait, by one-thirty we will be packed."

As promised, by one-thirty P.M., buyers from some of New York's finest establishments as well as individual collectors, began to appear. Armond greeted each new arrival as an old friend but it wasn't he who drew their interest. Weylin was subjected to an in-depth series of questions regarding the new vineyard. Satisfied with his description of the modern facilities and Hathar's protective process, they proceeded to taste the wine. The first in line, a sommelier for a trendy New York restaurant, gingerly sniffed the Cabernet while his facial expression registered obvious surprise. After taking one lingering sip, he glanced at the

price list. "Send me ten cases," he said, "with an option for ten more of this years production."

The crowd, an assembly of twenty or more potential buyers, upon hearing the sommelier's nonnegotiated request, pressed forward and began to place their orders. Several, made sizeable purchases before ever sampling the wine.

By three o'clock that afternoon, Armond had collected a stack of purchase orders for a total of four hundred and ten cases. "How's that for a short day?" he asked.

"I would never have guessed it possible?" Weylin replied in astonishment.

"McCain Vineyard has set a new standard for Italian Cabernet, which is by itself, somewhat of a rarity. Ah, by the way," Armond added, as he withdrew a folded document from his inner coat pocket and handed it to Weylin, "I took the liberty of having my attorney draw up a distribution agreement."

"Is there a notary nearby?"

"The exposition organizer's assistant is a notary, I will call her."

"What about importation, Customs and all that?"

"Not to worry. I have the necessary connections, after all, this is my business."

With the document signed and notarized, Weylin left the convention hall feeling exhilarated and confident that either he or Armond could arrange for the sale of the remaining inventory. Charlie Basso was right, he said to himself, while walking to the parking lot, the vineyard will turn out to be one heck of an investment and it's got my name all over it!