

## Chapter 6

Alitalia's flight 1653 descended through a dense fog, landing with a discernable bump on Pisa's tarmac. Weylin made his way through customs and immigration without a hitch and hailed a taxi for the ride to a hotel that had been suggested by the American Express travel agent.

The weather in northern Italy during the month of October can be tricky, warm and pleasant or cold, rainy and foggy. Weylin arrived during the latter.

The hotel was quaint and old with reasonably modern appointments. He looked around his room and thought to himself, it would have been nicer if Cassandra had come. Although the flight had left Newark at seven P.M., it was now eleven-thirty in the morning the next day and he couldn't decide if it was time for breakfast or lunch. By the time he had selected a nearby trattoria, it was twelve-fifteen P.M., early, by Italian standards, for lunch. The door was open, he walked in and chose a table in the front of the empty restaurant

alongside a large plate glass window. Minutes passed before an apron clad young boy approached. He wiped his hands and with a big smile looked at his wristwatch. “É troppo presto signore, la cucina non é ancora aperto,” he said, with a northern Italian accent.

Not understanding a word, Weylin gazed up at the boy with a blank expression. “I don’t speak Italian,” he said.

“Ah, Americano, aspetta, I bring my father,” the boy replied with his best attempt at English.

A moment after the boy disappeared into the kitchen of the small family owned establishment, a large barrel chested, balding man approached the table. “Welcome to Trattoria della Quaglia. I’m Paolo, the proprietor.”

“Your English is excellent?” Weylin commented, with obvious surprise.

“Columbia University, bachelor of science nineteen seventy-two,” Paolo proudly proclaimed.

“Maybe you can help me with some information about the local countryside?”

“I would be happy to, my family has lived here for more generations that I can count. I would have remained in New York if it weren’t for my father taking ill just after my graduation. I came back to help with the trattoria and as you can see, never left.”

Weylin started to ask a question but was interrupted by Paolo. “You know,” he said, “we don’t start serving lunch until one P.M. but my grandmother is in the kitchen today and she has already started the pasta. I will be happy to answer your questions but first you must taste her specialty ... consider it a marketing ploy to bring in more Americans.

Weylin smiled. “I’ll tell all my friends,” he promised, “what do you suggest?”

“The tortellini alla panna is her speciality and it is exquisite. It won’t do your

cholesterol any good but it will tickle your taste buds.”

While he waited, the young boy brought a large bottle of carbonated mineral water along with a small tray of flaky rolls and left. Weylin watched the pedestrian traffic through the window. Looks like a cross section of the population you might see in any small town, he observed. Angry hands waived from the windows of tiny horn honking Fiats as they skirted in and out of the noisy traffic, passed by the occasional Ferrari or Lamborghini.

Distracted by the approaching aroma of freshly grated Parmesan cheese, Weylin turned back to the table in time to see Paolo and his son carrying two heaping plates of tortellini, spinach and a bottle of wine whose label he could not see. Paolo plopped down into a chair opposite Weylin's. “I have decided to join you for lunch,” he said, “that is, if you do not mind.”

“Not at all, I would enjoy the company and perhaps you can answer some of my questions.”

Without another word, Weylin dove into the pasta and immediately stopped. “This is incredible—the best I have ever tasted,” he said.

Paolo smiled and filled Weylin's wine glass, repeating that act several times before lunch was finished.

As a few early arrivals chose widely separated tables and quietly opened their newspapers, Weylin began to interrogate Paolo. “What can you tell me about the town of Bolgheri?”

“Ah, the Etruscan coast. Are you an archeologist?”

“No. Actually, I'm here to look at a vineyard that's located outside of Bolgheri.”

“Bolgheri is the home of Sassicaia, one of our finest wines,” Paolo remarked, as he slowly turned the wine bottle around making its label visible to Weylin.

“I am familiar with the label and I’m deeply appreciative of your generosity. The wine was marvelous.”

“What is the name of your vineyard?”

“Camalia.”

“I’ve heard of it. Unusual production, mostly varieties of Cabernet. For some strange reason, they sell mostly to the regional hospitals.”

“What about the quality?”

“What little I’ve heard suggests that it is very good, too good in fact for the market they have chosen.”

“Do you have any information about the owners?”

“No, although, I have heard rumors that they are not Italians and that a lot of research goes on there. I didn’t know it was for sale.”

There was a brief lull in the conversation as they both sipped the exquisite wine. Finally, Weylin lowered his glass and stared across the table. “I’m curious,” he said, “what are the local hospitals like?”

“We have state sponsored institutions and private clinics. Some of the state run hospitals are fairly well equipped and do a good job, so I hear. Recently, however, the newspapers have mentioned an increase in the death rate that has been attributed to medical errors. I guess you have those in the states as well?”

The tiny trattoria was slowly filling up with regular patrons. Weylin emptied the last drop of wine from his glass and thanked Paolo for the information and lunch that he had refused to be paid for.

The Camalia management had arranged to send a car for Weylin and as he gazed at

the restaurant's wall clock he realized that its arrival was only minutes away.

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A black Mercedes S600 sedan was parked in front of his little hotel when he returned from the trattoria. "Dr. McCain?" a deeply accented voice inquired.

"Why, yes. Are you from Camalia?"

"Si."

The driver opened the rear passenger door and Weylin entered, immediately realizing that he had forgotten the lessons of his past experience. *Always err on the side of caution; never get into a strange car unless you have good reason to believe that it's a friendly.* These words were engraved in his memory by a Russian ex-KGB agent, Sascha, whom he had grown to like and respect and with whom he'd fought the A.I.F. during the Olera affair.

"How did you recognize me?" Weylin asked.

"The hotel clerk described you and the clothes that you were wearing today," the driver replied, in perfect English.

"I see. How long is the drive to the vineyard?"

"Usually one and a half hours but the Mercedes is fast. Maybe one hour."

Weylin considered his inexactness somewhat strange since he had just made the trip to Pisa, he reasoned, he should know how long it took him to get here. His suspicion turned out to be misplaced. They arrived at the vineyard without incident. The photos supplied by Charlie Basso had not done justice to the appearance of the main building. It was a modern facade, although, it was surrounded by several clearly older structures in various states of

disrepair. It looks out of place, he remarked to himself, almost as if it were created for my benefit.

As the car pulled to a stop, two white coated individuals exited and walked to their respective parked automobiles. Weylin paid little attention and followed the driver through the front doors into a large rotunda. Soft music played in the background while delicate colors filtered through a high stained glass skylight and recessed lighting illuminated a string of original paintings. This has the feel of an art gallery, not a working vineyard, he mused.

A suave, dark complexioned man with shiny black hair, expensive gray silk suit and goatee entered the rotunda. Smiling, he greeted Weylin as he approached. “Dr. McCain, Alberto Capelli, so nice to meet you,” he announced, in perfect British accented English. “I trust you enjoyed our countryside on the ride over?”

“Yes, it was quite beautiful.”

“I was informed that your time with us is limited, so, let me begin with a tour of the main building. Our enologist will take over afterwards and provide an overview of the property and her facilities.”

“I had hoped to meet with the principals?”

“What a pity. I am afraid that will not be possible but I am the president, surely I can answer any questions you might have.”

Considering Weylin’s previous review of the company’s financials, Capelli’s tour proved to be of limited value, although he was impressed with their accounting system, computerized inventory and, most of all, the wine.

The tasting room was a marvel in itself. Entirely wood paneled with a high gloss honey colored finish, accompanied by racks of Camalia wine attached to its three large walls.

A similarly finished thirty foot table sat in the center of the room surrounded by a dozen wooden chairs. Weylin stood by the table as he admired the rooms fit and finish and was overcome by the room's complete lack of odor given its construction. "With your attention to detail, I'm surprised by the absence of comfortable Italian leather chairs," he remarked.

Capelli, while removing several bottles from the racks, turned and ginned. "It is that very attention to detail that requires their omission," he explained, "that is, leather exudes an aroma of its own—we did not wish it to intermingle with that of the wine."

Accepting the explanation, Weylin chose a chair and sat while Capelli uncorked three bottles of Camalia Cabernet, representing a three year vertical selection. He carefully poured a small amount from each bottle into the six glass sitting on the table. Weylin gently swirled the first selection and raised the rim of the glass to his face, "Excellent nose," he remarked, "I detect the aroma of cedar wood and just a hint of black currants. It's smooth on the palate and amazingly fruity with a hint of pepper. This is the nineteen ninety-seven I assume?"

"I applaud your expertise and I think you will find the next two vintages to be of equal quality but perhaps a bit less mature," Capelli said, as he waited expectantly.

Impressed and marveling at the amazing quality of Cabernet produced by this small vineyard, Weylin's imagination flew into high gear as he contemplated his plans to alter the vineyards distribution to a more discriminating population. Before leaving the room, he questioned Capelli about his decision to sell the vineyard. He learned that the vineyard was developed primarily for research purposes and was never intended to be a major producer. Since the property was landlocked on all sides, there was no opportunity for expansion; sale was the only option.

Following completion of the tasting experience, Weylin was introduced to the

winery's enologist, a middle aged silver haired female with little or no sense of humor. Her laboratory was situated in an underground bunker that could not be seen from the surface. "I have some familiarity with the chemistry of wine making," he said, "but what are all these computer terminals for?"

"The entire irrigation system is controlled from this one location," the enologist explained.

"Tell me about your disease resistance process."

Her lips assumed the shape of a subtle smile. "I have worked on that process for many years," she replied. "Modern times have brought many diseases to the ancient vines of my native country."

"And that is?"

"I am Egyptian by birth, Dr. McCain."

"I assume you are saying that the vines and grapes of Camalia are now resistant to some of the more common ailments."

"Not some, Dr., but most. More specifically, black rot, mites, nematodes, powdery mildew and the worst of all, downy mildew."

"Impressive."

She gestured towards a colorful bank of computers just behind Weylin. "With those machines," she said, "we control miles of underground injectors that supply the agent to the vine's root system."

"What is the chemical nature of the agent?"

"It is proprietary and classified."

"Does it alter the quality of the grapes?"



“Only in a positive way.”

“It is my understanding that you will remain with Camalia after its sale to monitor the use of your pesticide?”

“I prefer not to call it a pesticide but, yes, I will remain for a period of time.”

After meeting several other key personnel and laborers, he returned to the surface where he encountered Signore Capelli. Assured that he could return the following day if desired, he was escorted to a clearing on the west side of the main building where a chartered helicopter was waiting to provide an aerial view of the vineyard and his return trip to Pisa.