



COMBAT VINTAGE CHART MENTALITY

PART II: A HOTEL ROOM IN CHINON, 1979

A few kilometers out of Beaune I switched license plates. I kept to the back roads, zigzagging across the countryside. When I checked the rearview mirror I saw nothing but autumn leaves swirling up in my wake. You can't be too careful. In my line of work hard-earned info could wind up in unfriendly hands. It has happened. I glanced at the backseat. Two red Burgundies were laid out like babes in a crib.

My contact's name was Joguet, code name TASTER. In Paris his cover was artist/sculptor. In Chinon whatever he wore bore the purple stains of a winemaker. When most of Chinon was tucked in against the cold night I heard three whisper-like raps on my hotel room door.

"How did you get past the desk?" I asked, shaking his three-and-a-half-fingered hand.

"I've known her since school," he said. "Don't worry. She's been vetted. She's never even laid eyes on another wine importer."

His own eyes blazed with anticipation as I uncorked the goods. I needed Joguet's input. There was a war on. I believe in freedom of the press and every other kind that you can possibly imagine, but some in the media were going too far in too dangerous a direction. Wine-loving Americans were being tricked; some were following along like sheep. I needed that final bit of the puzzle that would awaken the populace to the treachery of vintage chart mentality.

The first Burgundy was a 1976 *Grand Cru*. You know what that meant in 1979? Consumer stampede. The second was labeled Saint Aubin 1973. With that name and vintage it would make about as big a splash as a Pinot Noir grape falling into the Dead Sea. I had to make people see reason. Folly pains me.

Joguet held his glass up to the dim yellow light. French hotels don't

waste bucks on bulbs. The 1976 was dark as night, big and powerful. The 1973 paled in comparison. It didn't have the same weight, even I could see that.

Finally he spoke, and those weak-kneed, yellow-bellied heartless creeps who are naive enough to shop for wine armed with those idiotic vintage charts should have been there to hear him. My wineglass had a hidden microphone and I sniffed it on.

"The 1976 has not yet come together," Joguet said. "One must wait a few more years. But you know, it will be of a unit, of a whole piece, for a very short time. The different parts will align themselves into a harmonious unit and then pass very quickly out of harmony. You will have to jump on it and drink it up during a short period of time.

"The 1973 will never be *great* wine. It is St. Aubin. But it is fine, an intelligent wine, the most difficult to make. One sees all of it, the Pinot Noir fruit, the *gout de terroir* of that particular site, the structure, the perfect harmony of all its constituent parts. In each aspect of the taste experience, from the aroma through to the aftertaste, there is nuance and surprise. It is not a wine for everyone; it took intelligence to make it, and it takes intelligence to appreciate it."