

A sample blog posting

WINE, *not* WINO

To produce and market a superior bottle of wine is a cultural accomplishment. Or such was the premise of a talk to be given by a middle-aged friend of mine--a connoisseur of fine wine. Rupert had been asked to give this talk at an event hosted by our local bookstore. The purpose was to promote his recent book on the best wines in our region.

But late the night before, he called me in a ripe panic. “Steve, you’ve got to help me! I’ve got food poisoning from a bad shellfish dinner at *Les Fruits de Mer*. I can’t keep a thing down! I can’t stand up, much less give a talk.”

“Now listen,” he said with conviction, after pausing to retch in the background. “No one at the store has ever met me in person—they only know me by reputation. And you know how much we look alike. I’ve already written the darn talk. All I need is for you to show up, dressed in a suit and read it. You’re an ace at public speaking. You’ll do better than I would, if I were well!”

For many, such a scheme would have been an invitation to disaster, in appearance, taste, aroma, body and finish. But I’d studied drama in college, taught it to high school kids, and was intrigued by the challenge. The audience, Rupert had said, would be mostly millennials, who wanted to learn about quality, hard-to-find, handcrafted wines around the world, and who were keen to uncover the latest innovations in wine culture. Rupert’s book gave all those details. All I had to do, he had said, was read the talk and look distinguished.

“You’re a drama teacher,” he had cajoled. “Easy peasy for you!”

And so it *could* have been, under ideal circumstances.

But early on, snags arose.

I myself, knew nothing about wine. I grew nervous to find that my audience consisted of surprisingly intelligent, curious millennials and other, older folk, both of whom had seen or read online about many of the best wine regions in the world.

A few nervous scratches I made to my head caused the talcum powder I’d sprinkled in (to add 20 years to my looks) to fall out, onto my tweed blazer. It could pass as dandruff, I reassured myself, but felt increasingly self-conscious. A fellow in the back row kept tilting his head at me and looking puzzled—likely a former student of mine, I thought, relieved that I was wearing dark glasses. Worse still, the host, a voluptuously dressed, *bon vivant* of a woman, kept plying

me with various wine samples, displayed in beautifully packaged, two-serving bottles, marked “Chic, Sexy, Sophisticated.” I couldn’t refuse the culture I was there to promote

I’d have to kill Rupert.

He had been wrong at every level! The night was less to promote his book than to launch great new wine companies! And since I hadn’t drunk much alcohol since college, my speech slurred after only a few sips. Rupert’s talk got harder and harder to read—letters expanding and contracting on the page, before my very eyes. Sweating under the bright lights, I eyed the clock on the far wall and wondered how I’d escape.

But in the end, all was well.

The wine on which I had become drunk became my saving grace. Both millennials and the middle-aged patrons in the audience responded better to it than to me.

My closing words were drowned out by the audience’s appreciation for the company’s samples and for its beautifully packaged, cylindrical bottles. Both were shared approvingly, from one row down to the next. As I receded into the background, flush with alcohol and mortification, the wine had stolen the show.