

“Hullo sir, what may I help ye with on this wondrous autumn day?” exclaimed a short, balding man, his accent seeming to be of Scottish origin.

“Yes, I’d like to sample your winery’s finest today,” I responded, not knowing of what to choose from the small countryside store.

“May I inquire what the special occasion might be?” asked the man, who appeared to own the tiny venue.

“Well to be specific, I am trying to purchase a fair present for my old friend Kenneth Pinkerton’s birthday. Mr. Pinkerton, I believe, lives not far from here,” I responded.

“Ah, yes. Well in that case I have a bottle that should suit your purpose quite well,” he replied optimistically. I soon bought a bottle of Argentinean port for the event I was soon to embark upon.

A small few minutes later, my stride slowed down, and I opened and squeezed through a rustic-metal gate, which I knew led to the famed *Pinkerton Estate at Hemmingrock*. I dragged my out-of-date suitcase, its polyester ripping out at every bump, along the slightly rugged stone drive.

My reason for traveling to this apparently lavish, and high-end lakeside establishment was an invitation to the celebration of my old friend Kenneth Pinkerton’s sixtieth birthday. Kenneth, whom I had first encountered in the early portion of medical school, was currently a single man, having gone through a most traumatic divorce prior to my visit to his prized home. I had originally thought of purchasing the ebony-shaded revolver that Mr. Pinkerton once admired when we held sleeping quarters together in our school years. Although, hearing of him being a notable connoisseur of fine wines caused me to purchase the quite expensive bottle of Argentinean port as a gift instead.

I paced up a slight hill in the recently smoothed driveway, and with some wooded area that had previously blocked my view behind, I could finally see the marvel of the estate and its magnificent surroundings. My mood was content, and the late-autumn breeze chilled me slightly as I paused my

walking a bit, and whipped out and lit a Cuban cigar.

I suddenly felt the presence of another person, and I was thrilled to see how different my old friend Kenneth Pinkerton looked.

“Aye, my old pal!” exclaimed the joyous voice of Mr. Pinkerton, who wore a burgundy business vest at the time.

“Why Kenneth, it truly is quite the delight to finally see you, after we differed paths such a long time ago,” I said grinning, in all honesty.

I was led down a flight of moss-covered, damp stairs, along a gravel path, and inside and into the main section of the Pinkerton home. The butler, Sir Raymond, summoned me and showed me to my luxurious guest room, without any speaking. After settling in, and after I partook of a much-needed rest, I gathered a small number of items and headed to the primary lounging area of the estate. I met the four other very peculiar friends of Kenneth Pinkerton.

“Everyone, I’d wish for you to meet my friend, Aubrey Calvert,” said Mr. Pinkerton, introducing me to the other guests.

“This is Mr. Lyman Pratt, from the United States. He and I have been working on some real estate paperwork that would expand my already gleaming properties, for he is a top of the line man for that kind of work.” Pratt and I exchanged greetings, and Kenneth Pinkerton spoke again.

“This is my oldest friend, from my childhood, Ms. Leslie Rochester. We lived near each other in Devonshire on Stratham, and were longtime grade school classmates,” pointed out Kenneth.

“Honored and delighted to meet you,” said Ms. Rochester, who appeared to be about the same general age of Mr. Pinkerton. I kindly responded back.

I was then introduced to and greeted by Marie Quinkert, Kenneth’s old workplace secretary, and to Martin Broadway, who I realized to be a very *egoistic* playwright.

I wasn’t the only guest who came bearing alcoholic gifts, for Mr.

Pratt, the real estate agent, also brought some pinot noir. Pinkerton quickly opened the first bottle, which appeared to be the gift *I* had presented him.

“Mr. Calvert, you surely deserve the honor of having the first sip,” he said graciously. Despite the supreme generosity, I declined the offer and instead went for the intricate collection of French Gruyere` and table water crackers.

“Well in that case, I shall offer this quite marvelous substance to my oldest friend, Ms. Rochester.”

Leslie, whom I had only met briefly, took a glass and the waiter poured a portion of the port into it.

“You know, this really doesn’t taste like the port that I’m accustomed to,” she said questioning the taste. Before Leslie Rochester could make another noise though, she promptly dropped to the floor, dead, as the other guests and I gasped in awe.

The coroner’s report, which came in the following day, determined that she had consumed a significant amount of poison! Yes, we were all shocked to hear that, but even more thankful for not drinking the port, leading to our inconvenient deaths too.

Everyone immediately assumed foul play was the cause of her untimely death, but I clearly did not know who would have wished to poison and kill the seemingly sweet and generous Ms. Leslie Rochester. The local authorities couldn’t pin the death of Ms. Rochester on one individual, and the bottle in question did not seem abnormal or to have been tampered with. Also, it seemed completely coincidental.

I soon knew that I might be considered a primary suspect, for I had delivered the wine *and* also refused the first taste. Mrs. Quinkert pointed these things out to the baffled police lieutenant.

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I was still adjusting my eyes to the strange light streaming in from the

barred skylight above. I was trembling due to the warmth-lacking, moldy cot I had slept on, when a fairly large man appeared banging on the cell door.

“Don’t ye *ever* even think about trying getting away from the mischief you done, but for now you’ve being cleared,” stammered the large-chinned, older man. To explain this in more detail, I had been released from a small, countryside jailhouse, after it appeared the evidence was too lackluster to hold me for attempting to murder someone during Kenneth Pinkerton’s gathering. The assumption on the opposition’s behalf, was that I somehow poisoned the bottle of port I had brought to the festivities of Kenneth Pinkerton’s birthday celebration, with the wish of someone’s death. My court date was to be on the twenty-second of the month, and I knew that the clock was ticking in order for me to find the real cause of poor Ms. Rochester’s untimely death.

My mind was entirely confused at that moment, and about a minute later my dilapidated sandals were walking me on a gravel path that seemed vaguely familiar. At the beginning of my visit to the English Countryside, I briefly entered a roadside winery down the lane from the Kenneth Pinkerton’s famed estate. I found myself in the exact footpath I had been that previous day. My memory was starting to fall back into place, but the piercing rays of the autumn sun made focusing my eyes difficult. Although much in need of rest, I curiously ventured into the winery, whose owner was busy moving new imports about the small store. I figured it wouldn’t hurt to inquire a bit about the bottle of port I had purchased for Mr. Pinkerton—the bottle that had caused me both discomfort and annoyance.

“Hullo, sir, I recall you’ve been to this spot before, am I correct?” spoke the balding owner. I nodded briefly, and then began requesting information.

“I’m sure you’ve heard the most tragic news from Pinkerton’s Estate, have you not?” I inquired.

The elder gentleman acted somewhat surprised, and seemed

completely unfamiliar to the situation when I explained Leslie Rochester's unfortunate end in brief. I explained nothing in relation to the fact of the man selling me the cause for her death.

"Does Mr. Pinkerton hold any feuds with others?" I asked in an inquisitive, yet demanding tone. I began to ponder if someone had attempted to actually kill Kenneth Pinkerton. From what I knew, there was no motive for the lady's death, and probably, to the possible murderer's dismay, the poisoned bottle did not end up in the hands of the person it was intended for.

"Oh, no sir, that good-natured man is loved by all of the individuals in this area," smiled the wine storeowner. Without any pausing, I asked a question that took the winery owner by surprise.

"Could someone deliberately poison a bottle of wine in a fairly discrete way, perhaps?"

"I... well, do not understand," remarked the confused man. "That is all, I would assume?"

Before he could change the subject and interest me in his wine collection, I gave an abrupt 'thank you', and proceeded out of the store.

My thoughts about the case suddenly differed when a surprisingly welcoming Kenneth Pinkerton informed me that Ms. Rochester's death was, according to a more recent report, 'accidental'. Although this fact was previously held from me, it was the basis of my release from the Breconshire jailhouse. I was still sold on the idea of someone murdering Leslie Rochester, but at that time was more appreciative to feel comfortable and safe again. I reclined in a leather rocking chair, and snacked on a cherry-almond biscotti while the deputy chambermaid, Gladys, poured me steaming tea.

And while Lyman Pratt observed the daily financial times intently, and Marie Quinkert and Martin Broadway engaged in chatter, Kenneth explained more of the strange circumstances surrounding Leslie Rochester's death to me. Apparently, the death had been ruled accidental because the toxin was actually a rare bacterial condition only found in one in every

nine-hundred and ten bottles of wine shipped overseas. Puzzled, I still had a consciousness that someone had made a failed attempt at Kenneth Pinkerton's life. But who would want to get rid of him? Lyman Pratt, Marie Quinkert, Martin Broadway, one of his beloved servants? No, these were all far too unlikely. But if I said anything in regards to that, I knew it would be dismissed, due to the botulism or whatever it was. I was tired, and I took a deep breath to try to ease my thoughts, and then got up and headed for my room. I was interrupted, though, as Pinkerton suddenly addressed the small group.

“Well, all, I know we are all still coping with the dreadful fact that someone here has passed on,” he began, “but if you will generously excuse me, I need to go down to the creek near the winery and meet with one of my property consultants.”

Oddly enough, Kenneth Pinkerton spoke as one would, trying not to be caught for a serious crime. But he didn't seem like the kind to do that. However, I knew someone that did.

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I dashed and split open the entrance gate to the Pinkerton home, in hope of locating and saving a completely unaware Kenneth Pinkerton from catastrophe. I spotted him not long ahead on the winding driveway, and before I could discontinue his trek, he bent over and observed an object, which appeared similar to a syringe. I rushed straight towards him, grabbing his fair-weighted body and throwing us both into a swampy, roadside ditch.

“By heavens! Are you insane?!” exclaimed a shocked and angry Kenneth Pinkerton, mud now covering his clothing.

“I would think you would much rather be this filthy, than be slain right now like your childhood friend Leslie Rochester,” I warned him in a firm tone of voice. I caught my breath and dragged us into deeper underbrush. Pinkerton gasped.

“Old friend, you’ve better be more careful next time you buy up land here. Someone, who is very near here right now, wanted you dead. They even went as far as buying a syringe to insert infectious bacterial matter through the cork of the wine bottle I gifted you.

“My friend, your trusted wine store owner down the lane has been planning to get rid of you ever since you wanted to expand your property, and furthermore isolate his. After coincidentally receiving a bottle of wine with fatal bacteria in it, he inserted some of the substance into a bottle of port, which he recommended for me to give you. He could only hope, though, that the bottle would reach you first.

“This explains Ms. Rochester’s immediate reaction to the Port, when she referred to it as ‘different,’ because along with the bacteria, came the different wine it was from,” I explained to Kenneth, who was clearly in disbelief, very nervous, yet also amused.

Later, the wine storeowner was apprehended. I attended his trial after recovering from botulism poisoning, which I got when I touched the syringe. Kenneth Pinkerton, although devastated by Leslie Rochester’s death, had a twinge of guilty relief that he had not fallen victim to a glass of foreign port.