

What you're doing now...

Sparing splinters of pale light splayed across the black hardness of the Brazilian mahogany floor in the study of Evan's smart, upscale home. The room had the most peculiar acoustic qualities... even the slightest step or shuffle would resonate against the darkened bookshelves and glass surfaces. It was almost like an echo chamber, thought Bert as he made his way, ever so cautiously, to the cabinet at the end of the room. There, softly illuminated in a halo of cream-colored light, was the dusty prize, an obviously ancient and therefore valuable bottle of the rarest wine he could imagine.

In the breaking-and-entering business, the most important thing is to have a buyer lined up. Anyone can get into a house, and anyone can get back out again with an armload of stuff. The trick is knowing what you're going to do with that stuff. After all, why should Bert go around selling ten-dollar DVD players when he had just met a wine connoisseur who paid a guy he knew two hundred dollars for an old dusty bottle of wine... an old bottle just like this one.

The connoisseur, a hard man by the name of Chancre Elliot, owned "Ratchets," a dive bar on the sleazy end of town. He was in his fifties, and the scars on his face suggested he might have lost a few of many fights. He always dressed in dark colors, because bartender Becky had told him once that dark clothes were "slimming" (though he obviously didn't hear her laughing about it later with a customer, "You can't dress up a turd"). Still, Chancre was a methodical man, his words well considered and carefully placed. "I'll buy a good bottle of wine from anyone," he had said. "I'll pay top dollar, too, and I don't care where or how you get it." Bert must have been nearly drooling at the thought of it, because Chancre laughed and said, "Come back, son. By the looks of you, you're already spending that money. Don't forget to breathe, son – it's what you're doin' right now that counts, not what you're gonna be doin' later."

Bert had done his homework. His buddy, Clive, at the liquor store, had kept an eye out, and had found a suitable mark -- a young guy who always bought the most expensive wines. He had them special ordered, and a few of them were close to a



thousand bucks. The name was on the credit card, "Evan Newsome," and it was easy enough to get the address from there. Bert had first seen the auspicious bottle from a window in the back yard at the ungodly hour of 3:30 on a Sunday morning – the bottle so prestigiously displayed among old, leather-bound books and bronze art deco statuary. No alarm system – not so much as a cat to stand in his way.

Research complete, acquisition was a relatively simple task. It was almost too easy, he thought with a chuckle.

But now it was Chancre's turn to laugh. All that mental money Bert had already spent -- all those unhatched chicks -- vanished before his eyes as Chancre rolled the bottle in his hands and said, "You've got quite a catch here, son. This bottle of port's gotta be worth at least three, four dollars. You musta gone *all out* to come up with a prize like this!" Bert was crestfallen, embarrassed. Without saying a word, he bowed his head and went home, where he poured himself a glass of contraband.

As he sipped stolen port in the murky darkness of his apartment, a splinter of light scampered across the carpet and up the bare wall -- a reflection from the headlight of a passing car. Some of the wine had slipped under his tongue, tickling a few seldom-used taste buds as the events of the past few days followed the track of the light-- and Bert had a revelation.

Some people, he reasoned, collect rare wines like a stamp collector collects stamps. They research the wines and order them and buy them up, so that they can horde them in a special place, like a wine album or vault. Then from time to time, they'll go into their wine vault to gloat -- getting a sense of self-importance from the value of their collection. These people may be investors or aficionados or simply speculators, but in every case they buy wine for the *potential* for pleasure that it may offer someone at some later point in time. So on the one hand, you have people who buy wine for reasons obscure and diverse and which, most importantly, lie in a remote future.

While this all seemed very obvious, going through the details in his own mind allowed Bert to understand for the first time that this Evan Newsome was the *other* kind of wine customer. "It's what you're doin' right now," he reminded himself. Some people, he suddenly appreciated, buy wine to drink it.

-- Troy Carlyle