

1.

The navy van veered into the mouth of the driveway and stopped suddenly. Oliver emerged from the wine shed a couple of hundred metres away to investigate. A plume of smoke smouldered from the kombi's exhaust, and he caught a whiff of sulphur – another lost tourist, no doubt, trying to find a cellar door that'd still pour a tippie this late in the afternoon. He watched the distant figure step from the van and push open the gate to his vineyard.

The gate that said 'PRIVATE'.

Perfect, Oliver thought. Do people not read signs anymore, or do they just not give a fuck?

He walked from the shed towards his cottage, closer to the driveway, admiring his surroundings. Oliver loved Mudgee in the middle of autumn. The weather was still kind and his grapes had been picked and crushed into barrels. Looking out across the open landscape, the view of the mountains never failed to cheer him. The old vines were yellowing, and a copse of maples and liquidambar were losing leaves, floating and settling across a small patch of lawn beside the house. Oliver had already prepared his speech to

deliver to the man making his way up the driveway: *No cellar door here, sorry, mate. You'll have to go up further to Vernon & Sons, but I have a feeling they've punched the clock for today.*

The driver opened the door and stepped onto the gravel, and Oliver froze.

The man wore his hair the same way that he did: slightly long fringe pushed to the right. Identical nose and almond-shaped eyes. Oliver felt like someone had placed a mirror directly in front of his face. The winemaker tried to speak, but nothing came out. He was in shock.

'I wanted to call,' the lookalike said, stretching languidly like a cat that had been cooped up for hours. 'Apparently you have a phone, but no one would give me the number. I couldn't even get an email for the vineyard.'

'No distractions like that out here,' Oliver said. For some reason, he was wary about approaching. It had been a long time. Fifteen years? 'I was just heading in for a shower before a wine show.'

The other man smiled, looking over Oliver's tattered jeans and the burgundy stains smudged on his shirt, as though he knew what Oliver was thinking. 'I can come back?' he offered.

Oliver paused – it sounded strange to hear his own voice coming from someone else's mouth. 'No,' he said. 'I'd invite you along, but there'd be too many questions.' He pointed towards the house. 'Why don't you go in?'

The visitor grabbed a large weathered suitcase from the back of the van and rolled it behind him as he followed Oliver inside. The cottage smelled of sandalwood and faintly of the garlic Oliver had fried with green vegetables and butter for lunch.

'Nice place, Oli.' The man looked at the paintings adorning the walls in the living room. Thick brushstrokes. Oils. Vineyards.

Coastal landscapes. Abstract. All worth a pretty penny and all painted by their mother. Theo unzipped the suitcase and produced a bottle of whisky. 'I was going to bring wine, but I thought that'd be like carrying coals to Newcastle.'

Oliver grinned, realising how much he'd missed Theo's sense of humour, his penchant for outdated idioms. 'There's food in the fridge if you're hungry,' he said, moving towards the bathroom.

In the shower, Oliver thought about what in his own life had changed since he'd last seen Theo. It would have been almost twenty years since they'd been close. Twenty years since they'd stolen cigarettes and snuck porn magazines into their bedroom; decades since they'd ridden their bikes up and down the street and around the block until dusk. Once upon a time, they'd shared everything: books, comics, games, clothes, friends, enemies. Then overnight, everything had changed.

When he emerged from the shower, his doppelgänger was smoking a cigarette on the balcony. He'd always envied his twin's ability to be content with quietness, with boredom. Oliver had ensured his life was filled with purposeful things to do – busyness – to avoid too many moments of silence. He couldn't help but notice how different they were as he watched Theo stare into the sky with an indolence Oliver could never manage in himself.

'Where have you been?' Gabe said as he lowered himself into Oliver's car, ignoring his seatbelt. 'You hate being late.'

'A random kombi just pulled up in the driveway.'

'Tourists. They're everywhere this week,' Gabe said.

'I thought the same, but then Theo jumped out.'

'Fuck.' Gabe whistled, long and loud, before flicking a curl of

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grey hair from his face and pushing his glasses to the bridge of his nose. 'It's been a while.'

'Longer than I've known you.' Oliver exhaled. 'No phone call, no letter, no messages to say he's coming.'

'In fairness,' Gabe said, 'you're not an easy man to get in touch with. How long is he staying?'

Oliver shrugged. 'It was a big suitcase.'

He manoeuvred the car into one of the last vacant spaces. A cluster of Mudgee winemakers and growers congregated near the door of the pavilion. Oliver groaned.

'Don't be like that,' Gabe said. 'You win something almost every year. It'd be rude not to show up.'

'Can't I just claim I don't play well with others and hermit away from promotional responsibilities altogether?'

Gabe put a finger in the air threateningly, but ruined the effect with a smile. 'You already do. You know this is basically the only event I ask you to attend.'

Oliver rolled his eyes and unstrapped his seatbelt.

'And one more thing,' Gabe said.

'Yeah. I'll be nice.'

Gabe paused. 'Just be wary of Theo. I know it's been a while, but remember, we've built this brand without him.'

Oliver wondered if Gabe knew something about Theo that he didn't. But what? As far as he could tell, Theo had never even set foot in Mudgee.

'He's not a criminal, Gabe,' Oliver mumbled eventually. 'He's my twin brother.'

Theo walked around the house like someone who had just checked into a hotel. He pawed through the bathroom drawers and kitchen cabinets, moseying from room to room. Then he sat down on a lounge chair for a moment and took a breath. His phone started to vibrate in his pocket, but he ignored it. Bugger him – if Harold wanted a fight, let him drive over here for it. Theo couldn't help but think the scumbag would show up sooner or later.

The afternoon wasn't anything at all like Theo had imagined. He'd concocted many potential meeting scenarios on the drive into Mudgee. How did he think it would *really* go down? Theo wasn't sure. One thing was certain: he hadn't expected to meet briefly with his brother and for Oliver to leave again so abruptly. It was a jolt – his twin brother there in front of him after so many years. Seeing how much he'd aged; how alike they were, even now.

Taking the whisky from the bag, Theo swigged, glancing at his mother's paintings for a moment before closing his eyes. One sentence kept sliding into his head, dislodging itself from his brain and falling into his mouth. He spoke it quietly to himself. 'Why did it take you so long?'

He picked up the bag and walked down the hallway to the office. There was a Royal typewriter, books on Champagne, Piedmont and Bordeaux, some papers and a *Gourmet Traveller Wine* magazine. A packet of cigarettes on a shelf. A thin layer of dust. Theo took a few books of his own from his bag and put them on top of the desk, before slipping his diary under some paperbacks.

From beneath his packed clothes, he pulled out two parcels wrapped in brown butcher's paper and set them on the desk. He glanced out the window to make sure no one was watching. The property was eerily quiet, the only sounds that of a truck shifting through its gears in the distance and the occasional cawing of birds

behind the house. Was it risky to come here now? Perhaps. Yet Theo knew he didn't have much choice. Despite the danger, the message had compelled him to drive to the vineyard, to Oliver.

Beside the desk was a chest of drawers. It was wooden, shabby, a restored antique with a colourful past. Theo pulled the large bottom drawer out altogether, exposing the floor below. He placed the two perfectly wrapped paintings on the floor in the back left-hand corner, before once again sliding the drawer onto its tracks. It had been, since the twins were children, an agreed-upon hiding place for anything they wanted to keep from prying eyes. Theo couldn't remember it ever letting them down. Stowing Julia's paintings under Oliver's drawer felt like the right thing to do. If anything happened to him, he knew Oliver would eventually find the canvases; they belonged to him as much as they did to Theo.

The air outside was crisp. Clouds loomed in the sky. The world felt so much bigger in the bush – even when you were surrounded by mountains. Theo walked across the small patch of grass towards what he assumed to be the wine shed. Sliding open the door, which let out a gentle groan, he stepped inside. There were oak barrels everywhere. Tanks, hoses, boxes, crates. In true Oliver fashion, everything was meticulously kept. There was a large barn door at the end of the room. Theo glanced around and wondered if there were any cameras. He thought that the door might be locked, but it slipped open. Inside were tables lined with sealed wine bottles, all bereft of labels. There was something peculiar about the scenario, but Theo couldn't quite put his finger on exactly what it was. Grabbing a bottle, he casually twirled it in his hands before arranging it alongside the others again. His handprints tattooed the bottle; the rest of the glass surface was heavily freckled with dust.

In the corner of the room, against the inside wall, was a piano.

It looked familiar. Ancient. The name *Bösendorfer* printed in golden glyphs on the open hood. He guessed it was the same piano their mother had inherited from their grandmother. Oliver must have hunted it down and bought it after everything had been sold.

Why did it take you so long?

There was a metronome atop the piano. Theo remembered it from when he'd learned to play a lifetime ago. He set it in motion and listened to the ticking pulse through the room.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Gabe grabbed them each a glass of prosecco as they joined a group beside the door.

'Are my eyes failing me ... Oliver Wingfield in public?' a gruff, sarcastic voice said loudly.

'Hello, Murray.'

Snowy-haired and loutish, somewhere in his early fifties, Murray was dressed in a suit that was twice as formal as anyone else's attire. After a decade spent managing neighbouring vineyards, he and Oliver still couldn't see eye to eye on pretty much anything.

'Must be going to win something, if you've come out past the front gate,' he almost spat.

Oliver took a sip of wine, keeping his cool. 'Didn't your mother ever tell you not to do up both jacket buttons?' He shouldn't be

getting into a useless argument with Murray today, but he couldn't help himself. When Murray didn't reply, Oliver said, 'You know, if I'd known you'd be here, I would have stayed at home.'

He smiled to himself, imagining the confusion he'd elicit if he'd brought Theo. Maybe he should employ his brother to attend events and competitions on his behalf?

'So, you're not agoraphobic,' Murray said, talking over Gabe, who had tried to change the subject. 'Just antisocial?'

'Most people just go for "arsehole".'

'I'll drink to that,' said Murray and raised his glass.

Oliver ambled to the bar, tipped down the last of the bubbly and grabbed a glass of something white. A woody chardonnay, judging by the smell. Some kind of brash nectarine-and-almond aroma. He tried to hide his contempt; he would have failed miserably at poker.

Oliver hadn't planned on making enemies when he'd moved to Mudgee, but it had happened organically enough. He held views on wine that others didn't particularly agree with. Purity and perfectionism over profit, for one. It certainly wasn't always the smartest way to run a business, but it meant he'd held onto his integrity and was still doing well. Murray and his younger brother, Charlie, didn't like Oliver's opinions. Didn't like the way he ostracised himself from their ethos. They didn't like that he didn't want to be in their circle. The Vernons had been growing grapes for generations – and in their view, Oliver was simply a rich city kid who'd blown into town with no ties binding him to anything. After Oliver's second vintage in Mudgee, when people started paying attention to his wine, Murray and Charlie had started the rumour that Oliver was a Balmoral boy experimenting with Daddy's money. He'd never bothered – or cared enough – to correct them.

Oliver looked around the pavilion. There was a string quartet plodding through a rendition of ‘Eleanor Rigby’. Penny was supposed to be helping tend the bar, but he couldn’t see her anywhere. Gabe and Murray were still standing together, both chortling, a woman beside them sharing an anecdote with overbearing enthusiasm. Oliver couldn’t help but wonder why someone as sage as Gabe Aitken could keep company with someone as lowbrow as Murray Vernon. Although, he reminded himself, arbitrary things connected people, and in the case of his vineyard manager and his neighbour, it was their mutual diversion: watching racehorses gallop past the post.

‘How’s the chardonnay?’

He jumped slightly, recognising Clare’s raspy voice before turning around. While she sounded her fifty years, she had the air of someone easily a decade younger, with her liquorice-black hair and the bright pendant earrings she wore. They had spent the morning tasting a few of Oliver’s wines and entering data into the program they’d set up in the cloud.

‘Not half as good as yours,’ he replied honestly.

‘Don’t know our tricks, do they, darling?’

Oliver cringed. It reminded him of a wine show a year earlier – one Gabe had made him attend – where a lady had approached Oliver and Clare, politely interrogating them with byzantine questions about biodynamics and the technology company they co-owned with Orson Denver.

‘Oliver, you trained with Mr Denver in California?’ the stranger had asked him.

‘We both did.’

‘And you helped him develop microclimate weather stations? I know it’s all very mysterious, but I really want the same technology

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for my vineyard. To know all of your tricks. I think you really need to sell it. People will pay big money.'

'We'll have to ask the boss about that one,' Oliver had said, smiling then making an excuse to leave for the bathroom.

Oliver nodded at Clare, coming back to the present. 'Speaking of tricks, have you heard from Orson, lately?'

Clare looked up abstractedly at the ceiling. 'Don't think that I have. Why do you ask?'

'After you left this morning, I noticed he hasn't updated his data for a few days, which isn't like him.'

'Valerie might have finally scored that holiday she's been pestering him about for years.'

'Yeah,' Oliver said, unconvinced. 'Maybe.'

He watched Gabe weave between a gaggle of journalists, some taking photos of winemakers in a novelty over-sized polaroid frame. He stood in the distance, waving Oliver and Clare over, and shunting them into a group of people Oliver barely knew.

'Oliver, I'd like you to meet John Geraghty, the Minister for Industry and Trade.'

They locked eyes and Oliver realised he recognised the man. Was certain he'd seen him before, he just couldn't pinpoint where. He was tall and banal in a typical old, white politician way. Salt-and-pepper hair, short back and sides. Slightly overweight, clean shaven. As soon as Gabe had finished his sentence, a woman pushed in and hugged Geraghty, unintentionally pushing the Minister away from Oliver. There was a sudden assault of spicy perfume.

'God, I hate her,' Gabe said, snubbing the pair. 'Someone needs to tell her a rosé should be a pale salmon colour, not a rich vermillion.'