

Charmaine Pauls

“Sombra 1999. Red blend. It is one of our earliest superstar wines.”

“I didn’t know wine also obtained superstar status. Your mom said something of the kind earlier. I’m afraid you wasted a good bottle on me. I know nothing about wine. You should have kept it for someone who could have appreciated it.”

He gave her a piercing look. “I chose it especially for you, because it suits you. I think it’s a wine that perfectly describes you.”

“What do you mean ‘suits’ me?” His gaze was so intense she had to look away.

“Did you read the label?”

She never read wine labels. “No.”

“Shall I recite it for you?”

She turned her head back to him in surprise. He wasn’t seriously proposing reciting a label like a poem, was he? She wanted to say no, but she was intrigued. She didn’t want to say yes because she wasn’t sure she understood where the conversation was going. In the end, she didn’t say anything and couldn’t tear her gaze away from him.

His eyes lowered and lingered on her lips. “Showcases sweet, dark, plummy fruit.” He spoke as if he tasted every word. Zenna looked on, mesmerized, as his gaze trailed leisurely from her mouth, down her neckline to her breasts. “Wrapped in a cedary cloak of earth, tobacco, and cassis,” he said, his voice soft and deep, his exploratory stare traveling to her hips. “Smooth and supple, framed with soft tannins.” His eyes burned on her thighs. “There is no need to cellar it.” Then those smoldering green eyes lifted and finally locked with hers again. “It should last well.”

She gaped, feeling an instant fire shoot from her stomach to her face. He had just had the nerve to compare her to a wine. A superstar wine. It was the most sensual description any man had ever given her. He was a dangerous man.

He studied her curiously. “I’m glad you liked the description.”

“What makes you think I liked it?” she said, and wanted to bite her tongue for sounding guiltily defensive.

“You’re flushed and your breathing has increased.”

She swore inwardly and tried to recover from her reaction. “It’s your port.”

“Port makes you breathe faster?”

He was laughing at her with those seductive eyes of his. “I’m not hyperventilating so don’t flatter yourself.”

“All right,” he said, looking like he didn’t believe her, “so I’ll only take credit for the blushing then.”

“I’ve just never been compared to a wine before. I’m not sure if I should be flattered, or insulted.”

## The Winemaker

“Let’s just say I’m not good with words. I communicate better through wine.”

“I should give it back to you.” She hoped he got her underlying message. “What a shame to waste it on a Pisco drinker like me.”

His pale emerald eyes held hers captive. “You don’t have to be an expert to appreciate wine. If you enjoy it, it won’t be wasted.”

She desperately wanted to change the subject, to break the spell. “It’s a lovely house.” She looked around the room. “You are so lucky to live here.”

His eyes followed hers. “I cannot imagine living anywhere else, but it comes with a price.” His expression suddenly became guarded. “It takes a lot of time to run a place like this.”

“You have lots of people who work for you, right?”

“I do. We have a team. However, they don’t do the job as well as I do.” He smiled in a teasing way, but she was sure he had meant it. He came across as a perfectionist.

“So what are you doing right now? What does a winemaker do in winter?”

“Right now? We’ve started pruning. It’s the end of the fermentation for the hearty reds. We’re bottling the young and older wines. The wines for aging are moved from vats to barrels after filtering.”

“All of this at once?”

“Did I mention administration, sales reports, and distribution?”

“Wow, all work, no play.”

“Maybe.” He gave her another dashing smile. “I’m more interested in talking about your home.”

“London?”

He nodded.

“Well, it has its charm, of course, but here, you have the sunshine, the space.”

“So, what is it going to be for you in the future, Zenna? London or Santiago?”

She looked into the fire. “I honestly don’t know.”

“Are you going to stay on in the house?”

She frowned. “No. I can’t afford the house. It’s a lovely mess because we signed a two year contract with a three-month notice period.”

“And Marcos—that’s his name, isn’t it?—left you to deal with it?” There was displeasure in his voice.

Zenna didn’t feel like talking about Marcos. She sipped the port without commenting.

“It so happens the owner of your house is our family lawyer,” he said. “Enrique is also a close friend. I think I can talk him into letting you off the