



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

May 1, 2015

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

Friends -

“The Black Grotto doesn’t exist,” I told Jeremy, “and even if it did, it couldn’t possibly hold enough water to matter.”

“Fifty-five bazillion gallons, according to my calculations,” Jeremy said. “Find that sucker and we’ll never work again. Can you smell my breath?”

“We’re three-hundred miles apart,” I said. “How could I smell your breath? And what calculations?”

“It’s conceivable,” Jeremy said, “Things are getting pretty fragrant around here. I’ve been chewing cardamom seeds instead of brushing my teeth. It started out as water conservation, but I actually get a lot of compliments. The Black looks to be much deeper than I originally thought. Few hundred feet, minimum. Although I expect the top to be empty, of course.”

“Why ‘of course?’”

“How else could it house the world’s second largest bat colony?”

“My mistake,” I said.

“I’m going out there this weekend. I’m going to use it as an opportunity to test the Vorton.”

“What’s the Vorton?”

“A revolutionary flashlight technology I invented a few days ago,” Jeremy said. I heard the sound of seeds cracking. “I’m afraid to turn it on above ground. You in?”

“Alright,” I said. (I am a very bored person. My face hangs like an old curtain. I will agree to almost anything.) “I’m in,” is what I said to Jeremy.

“Great,” Jeremy said. “You can pick me and Tito up at 5:30 on Saturday. That’s a.m.”

“What?” I said. “I’m driving? Who’s Tito?”

But the line had gone dead.

“Who was that?” my wife said, coming into the house just as I lowered the phone from my ear.

“Nobody,” I said.

“Was that Jeremy?” she said. “Was it?”

She had been in the garden and stepped toward me brandishing a trowel at the level of my throat.

“Absolutely not,” I said.

I waited until she and the kids were asleep on Friday night, then put the car in neutral and pushed it out onto the highway and drove south.

Have I told you about where Jeremy lives? It’s in Los Angeles, in a neighborhood that has been repeatedly destroyed by the collapse of various economic bonanzas over the years – most recently full-sized computers, oil before that, the arrival of Europeans in the New World before that, and so on. Dead oil derricks weep over the remains of rusting armor and 24-inch monitors. The house itself is a pink stucco number in the half-assed Spanish Colonial style that dominates the “old” neighborhoods of LA. It stands in defiance of its surroundings – a place where birds sit in the branches of the silk trees trading jokes, where dogs come to be understood, where rampant bougainvillea vines with their lurid tissue paper blossoms seem to hold up the ruined walls of the house itself, an arc of verdant happiness floating on the flood of mistakes that is Los Angeles.

“Pop the trunk,” Jeremy said, coming out of the house when he saw me stop out front. As he approached the car, I could, indeed, smell his breath.

Following him was a very small man with a curling mustache I assumed must be Tito. He was lugging



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something that looked like a black tool with a huge round lens bolted to it. Jeremy himself was carrying a number of things that I guess you'd call scrolls. When Tito put the light in the trunk, there was a noticeable effect on the suspension.

"Shotgun," Jeremy said, and we rode off through that doomed city and into the desert beyond.

What is it that makes the earth different colors? It is my understanding that iron is responsible for redness in soil, but what about yellow? What about white? What about purple? In the desert, where there is nothing to look at but the ground and sky, one finds oneself contemplating such things.

"So," I said to Jeremy, motioning at the back seat with my head. "I take it that's Tito."

"That's him," said Jeremy. "He's a genius."

I felt a pang of jealousy.

"Why is he staring at me and twiddling his mustache like that?" I said.

"He's not really staring," Jeremy said. "His eyes aren't actually taking in the outside world when he looks like that. He's not seeing you, he's seeing his thoughts."

"Hmm," I said, looking in the mirror at Tito.

"Take this left," Jeremy said.

"What left?" I said.

There were no roads I could see.

"Anywhere in here is fine," Jeremy said.

I turned off the pavement and we went bumping over the wasteland in my Volvo. The landscape seemed increasingly volcanic. Barren doesn't do it justice. It wasn't just that nothing lived there now; it seemed unlikely that it ever had. We were headed for a group of mountains that were nearly perfect cones. They rose out of the flatness of the plain like mounds of salt. We continued, more slowly now, until we were driving among them.

"Say the word, buddy," Jeremy said.

"Who are you talking to?" I said.

"This is it," Tito said. He had an accent, of course, but I couldn't say what kind.

By the time I got out the car, Tito was already out on the ground, running around with his head down like a dog on the scent of something.

"More like Toto," I said.

"That was cheap," said Jeremy, standing up from the trunk, hugging his scrolls and scowling at me. "Get the Vorton."

"You're right," I said, grabbing the light.

"Here is the place of the spot!" said Tito.

Jeremy and I ran over. I was winded by the time we arrived (about twenty feet away) and felt lucky not to have sprained my ankle. There, at the base of one of those giant cones, was a hole in the earth. It was perhaps three feet across and was completely dark. I was afraid, looking at it. I felt sure it was not the door to the mythical Black Grotto, but I figured it was probably the lair of some poor dehydrated animal that, given where it hung out all day, would be delighted to eat me.

"I'm going in," Jeremy said.

He handed the scrolls to Tito and, leading with his head, crawled inside.

"The pleasure is all yours," said Tito, stepping aside and motioning at this portal to hell like a maître d'.

I went inside. I was still carrying the Vorton, so it was hard for me to assume the protective posture I would have preferred, but sure enough, after a little scuffling, there I was, standing up in the dark. I heard the sound of Tito come in behind me. The smell of Jeremy's breath was so overwhelming in there that the thought of being eaten did not seem so bad.



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“You know how to turn this thing on?” I said, fumbling with the Vorton. Just as I said it, my finger found the switch and it came on. The light quality was more or less equivalent to a crappy flashlight.

“Point it away from me!” Jeremy said. He was covering his face with his forearms.

I shined it into the dark. We advanced, step by step into the nothingness, and as we did so, it opened before us. The smell of rotten earth came to me over the smell of Jeremy’s breath and I could hear a very faint high-pitched drone. I imagined a floor strewn with bones. Suddenly, we were falling down a steep hill, sliding on our butts. The light went out. We screamed and landed in a heap.

“Is everybody alright?” Jeremy said.

The high-pitched sound had changed. It was louder now, and it wasn’t a drone anymore but was millions of distinct sounds overlapping. I found the switch on the Vorton. The light shuddered and came on to reveal the glassy black water of a lake. I can’t say how big it was. The light of the Vorton shone out across it and disappeared into the darkness without revealing even the suggestion of an opposite shore. It was vast. Above the lake was the craggy and curved ceiling of a cave. It was mottled beige and seemed to move and shift like the skin of a giant living organism, inside the bowels of which we were lucky enough to be trapped. It was the bats. That high-pitched sound was them. They hung shoulder to shoulder as far the eye could see.

“Bingo,” said Jeremy, “freakin’ bingo.”

“What now?” I said.

“What now? Now we pump this sucker out. You know how many lawns we’re looking at here, man? You know how many swimming pools this is?”

I looked at the Black Grotto. It was one of those rare occasions when a thing you have heard about all your life turns out to be better than you imagined.

“You think that’s alright?” I said. “You think we should pump it?”

“Are you hearing this, Tito?” said Jeremy. “You should hear yourself, man. You sound like Fidel Castro when you get on these jags. You scare me, man.”

“Jag?” I said. “You’re the one on a jag!”

“Whoa,” Jeremy said, “lower your voice, man.”

“You lower your voice,” I shouted.

I gave him a little shove. He slipped in the mud or the wet bat poop or whatever it was and fell in the edge of the lake.

“You’ll pay for that,” Jeremy said.

“My fellows,” said Tito, “look.”

We turned in the direction he was pointing. The carpet of bats that covered the ceiling began to shift until, one by one, far off across the lake, the bats dropped from the ceiling and flew in our direction. Soon, the fabric of the ceiling was unraveling.

“Run for your likes!” shouted Tito.

I dropped the Vorton, and the light went out. Blindly, in terror, smeared with guano, we scrambled up the path. We screamed and waved at the bats over our heads. Tito was ahead of me and I heard him cry out as he slipped in the guano. I ran over him without a second thought. I trod his face in crap to save my own pathetic life. Jeremy was right behind me. I could smell him. In a few minutes, we emerged, gagging, from the Black Grotto. A swarm of bats poured out after us and then folded back into itself when it hit the sunlight and sucked back into the cave.

“Where’s Tito?” Jeremy said, looking around.

“He didn’t make it,” I said.

Jeremy looked at the mouth of the Grotto. Could we still hear the screaming of the bats or was that only in our minds? I imagined Tito in there – stumpy, inarticulate, feasted upon by winged rodents. “He was a good man,” I



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said.

We walked back to the car with the bat crap turning to crust on our faces. As we climbed in, I flashed ahead to the expression on my wife's face when she saw the seats. This is why I prefer doing nothing: however small we may feel in our daily lives, adventure can only serve to reduce us even further, not just in reality but in our estimation of ourselves.

I had started the engine when I saw something move at the edge of my vision. It was Tito. Bats swarmed around him as he emerged from the cave. He did not run and scream as we had, but only walked deliberately over to the car, opened the back door, and climbed in.

"Hey, man," Jeremy said, "good to see you."

"Yeah," I said, "we were just warming her up."

He didn't respond. In fact, he didn't speak until we were back in town, at which point he said, "Please to drop me at the Grey Dog Station."

I knew what he meant and I knew where it was. All the great abused geniuses of history have been funneled through the Greyhound Station in downtown LA – D. Boone, Oppenheim, Galileo – if not in fact, at least in spirit. We watched him walk away and felt a familiar hollowness return to our chests. No matter how many times you disillusion people, it is never painless.

"You want to come in for a beer?" Jeremy said when we had arrived back at his house.

"No," I said, "I think I better head home. Sorry about Tito."

"That's alright," Jeremy said. "He belongs in better company."

"You're right," I said.

We were standing in front of the gate that led to Jeremy's yard, and as I turned to go to the car, Jeremy called my name and I turned back.

"I built a racecar," he said, sadly.

"Yeah?" I said.

"Yeah. It's powered by hairspray. You remember Aquanet?"

"Yeah."

"I bought a truckload of expired cans for twenty bucks. I don't know why NASA never tapped into that stuff. It's incredible."

"I believe it," I said.

We were quiet for a moment. Night was falling over Los Angeles. A band of red-orange sky separated the lights of the city from their counterparts in heaven. Jeremy took some cardamom seeds out of his pocket and wiped them off and put them in his mouth. He offered me a few, and I took them.

"I'm going to take it out to Badwater next week for a run. We'll probably break the sound barrier and end up being racing legends."

"Sounds great," I said.

"I guess you could come along if you wanted," Jeremy said.

"Alright," I said.

"Really?" Jeremy. He looked up at me, his face beaming.

"Sure," I said. "No problem."

"Boom!" Jeremy said. "You can pick me up at 5:30."

"Wait," I said. "What?"

But he had already opened the gate and was running back inside.

Everyone receiving this shipment is getting at least a bottle of our 2011 Pyramid Cabernet, and most



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everyone will receive a couple bottles of the 2011 Alexander Valley Cabernet. 2011 was a difficult vintage by California standards; the summer never really got hot, and the fall was cool and brooding. The Cabernets produced in 2011 and how they compare to warmer vintages like '12, '13, and '14 typify the debate among serious fans of red wine: is riper always better?

I can answer that: no.

To clarify, if I had to choose between 2012 and 2011, I'd choose 2012. But, the difference isn't just ripeness. There are other factors at play. The summer of 2012 was hot, but the fall was actually fairly long and cool. 2012 is a monumental vintage and its virtues are made possible by a combination of various perfect conditions throughout the year. Likewise, although 2011 was difficult in some ways, it has things the 2012 lacks – namely, a quality of freshness and a brightness to the fruit that make these wines easy and pleasant to drink and give them a refreshing character that is rare in California Cabernet.

In the end, the beauty of being a wine drinker (or winemaker) is that we don't have to choose. No one wine can be everything. It's a mistake to think of it that way when you're drinking it, and it's a mistake to think of it that way when you're making it. I embrace vintage variation – it's what keeps things interesting.

With that: the Pyramid is a winemaker's darling of a vineyard. It is named for its steep, terraced front hill, but the whole place is rocky and rugged with spectacular views in every direction: Knights Valley to the east, Chalk Hill to the west and south, and Alexander Valley to the north. The steepness and exposure of the vineyard lead the Pyramid Single Vineyard Cabernet to be dark and intense every vintage. The 2011 is, as always, 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, and the aroma is very typical of the variety: Santa Rosa plums, blackberry bramble, a touch of coffee and almond blossom. It comes across the palate showing lots of dark fruit and finishes tannic and tangy.

Our 2011 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon is a blend of fruit from all three of our estate vineyards, about half from Red Winery, 30 percent from Stone, and 20 percent from the Pyramid. The heavy contribution of Red Winery fruit to the blend accounts for the bright, high-tone character of the 2011. At first whiff, this wine comes across as fairly young and tightly wound, but after a few minutes in the glass, it opens beautifully, showing Pinot-like floral aromas, along with raspberry and cherry and notes of allspice and anise. Cherry and dusty cocoa dominate the palate, and the finish is long and a bit flinty. This wine should age for a long time. Drink 2016 to 2026.

Some of you are also receiving a few bottles of our 2011 Merlot. This wine has made us a lot of friends. Hawkes is known as a Cabernet house but the clay-heavy soils in Block Five of our Red Winery Vineyard produce a style of Merlot that gets people's attention. The dirt there has a lot in common with the right bank of Bordeaux and, in my opinion, the wine does too. Our 2011 Merlot is, as usual, one-hundred-percent varietal and is sourced from our Red Winery Vineyard, planted by my dad in 1973. The aroma is dominated by red fruit and baking spices: raspberry, red cherry, nutmeg, and cloves. The finish is tart, and still slightly tannic. Don't let the delicacy of this wine steer you away from giving it the appropriate time in the cellar; these Merlots always age well, and this one shows a great deal of long-term potential.

These three wines are the last of the 2011's we'll ship. We will, however, be pouring the 2011 Stone Cabernet in the tasting room for about another month and the 2011 Pyramid for the rest of the summer. As usual, I advise you to come in and taste these wines before they're gone and, if possible, lay some down to sample against future vintages. It should make for interesting drinking.

One new release in this shipment that some of you will be lucky enough to receive is our 2014 Home Chardonnay. I am increasingly enamored of the 2014 vintage for everything from Cabernet to Pinot Noir to Chardonnay. The 2014 Home Chardonnay comes from our vineyard on Chalk Hill Road, first planted in 1972. It's a fabulous site for Chardonnay, and since we started making this wine in 2005, we have honed a technique to produce Chardonnay that represents the exceptional character of the vineyard, leaving out the things we don't like in most California versions of this varietal. Our Chardonnay is made without any new barrels or malolactic fermentation. For



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a wine defined foremost by its freshness - bright, crisp, and fruit-driven - the 2014 carries a bit more heft than past vintages. The aroma is huge and complex, ranging from honey to grapefruit to mango. There's a ton of citrus of all sorts here, notably Key lime and tangerine. The finish is tangy and flinty and refreshing.

In closing, I'd like to remind everybody of the summer events we have planned for Wine Club members: Single Vineyard Seminars vertical tasting in the vineyard on June 6, July 11, and August 1; Summer Concerts and Jimtown (with food) on June 20, July 18, August 22, and Sept 26. It is, as usual, beautiful around here. Come see for yourself.

Thanks for your support. – Jake