



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

November 14, 2022

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

“Man occupies his position atop the animal kingdom by coincidence,” Jeremy said. “In truth, he is a weak and paltry creature whose reign here on earth is destined for brevity.” “Talking like a guy in tights doesn’t make you right,” I said. “It just makes you annoying.” “Did you know the new North American Chess Champion is a California two spot octopus?” Jeremy said. “Is that plain enough language for you?”

“You’re telling me Brian Duns mire is an octopus?” I said.

I’m not much of a chess player, but I am a fan. I hadn’t seen Duns mire’s picture but it was my natural assumption that he was human.

“It’s a breakthrough for the species,” Jeremy said. “The press conference after he won was pretty moving stuff. This whole story is about his mom teaching him to play between shifts as a cave cleaner. This was all done through a vocoder, of course.”

“Of course,” I said.

I still didn’t believe him. If the best chess player in North America was an octopus, I think I’d know.

“You know what else?” Jeremy said.

“I’m sure you’ll tell me,” I said.

“I read an article in Scientific American this morning discussing a recent study concluding that humans have less fun, per capita, than any other animal on earth.” “Did they interview a platypus?” I said. “That is a miserable animal, right there.” “How do you know that?” Jeremy said. “I’ll bet you’ve never spent more than five minutes with a platypus.”

“Like I’d want to,” I said. “It’s gotten oppressive, all these animals all over the place. I’m just a man, that’s all I am. I don’t speak donkey, alright? Sue me.”

“You’ve got a problem,” Jeremy said.

“Your moms got a problem,” I said.

“I told you about my buddy Wayne with the room for rent?” Jeremy said. “Well, a pig just moved in on Wednesday. We had beers. He’s actually a really cool guy.” “There goes the neighborhood,” I said. “What kind of pig?”

“You’re starting to make me a little uncomfortable,” Jeremy said. “I’ve always gotten the vibe from you that you’re not cool with other species.” “Why would you say that?” I said. “I’ve got lots of animal friends.”

“The way you talk to your dog, for one thing,” Jeremy said. “*Buddy* this, *Buddy* that. He has a name.”

“Alright,” I said. “Geez. I’ll keep it in mind.”

I’d never really thought about it, I guess. The way I talk to animals. The way I see them. I confess, I’ve never really seen them as our equals. Does that make me a turd? “I’ll tell you what,” I said. “Why don’t you get old Wayne on the phone? Lets us and him and this pig fellow – what’s his name? Let’s tip a few and get to know each other.” “His name is Cameron,” Jeremy said. “And he’s a wine drinker.”

“That’s fine,” I said. “Wine is cool. Tipping is not an activity exclusive to beer, as far as I know.”

What kind of a name is Cameron? I was thinking. *It’s one of those last-name-as-a-first name deals they have on the East Coast.* He sounded like a mighty tweedy, this pig. “Alright,” Jeremy said. “I’ll call them. But don’t embarrass me.”

“*Moi?*” I said. “*Jamais!*”

We met at a place called the Nutty Irishman. The sign was, predictably, a leprechaun with oversized testicles. Wayne and Cameron were sitting at a hightop table in the back. I couldn’t help but notice that Cameron’s feet didn’t reach the floor. That and he was wearing an argyle vest. We went over and introduced ourselves. Wayne and Jeremy ordered a pitcher of Schlitz. I waited to see what Cameron ordered, then asked for the same thing. A glass of white wine. The drinks arrived and the four of us touched glasses. I noticed Cameron sticking his snout in the glass and inhaling before he drank, so I did the same thing.

“Lovely,” I said.



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"I suppose it is," Cameron said, "for a *bar* wine."

"That's what I meant," I said. "Like, it's pretty good for a crappy wine."

We sat there chatting. Wayne and Jeremy became engrossed in an argument regarding the perspective lyrical merits of Chris Stapleton and Nas. Little bits of foam formed at the corner of Jeremy's mouth. He's unreachable in that state. You never know how long it's going to last. "So," I said to Cameron. "What do you do for work?"

Cameron was looking at his phone. It took him a moment to acknowledge me. "What was that?" he said, looking a little exasperated.

"I asked what you do for work," I said.

"Oh," he said, "I've been with a startup since March. We're developing a diet coach app. The idea is that you can tailor it to whoever you are and whatever your personal goal is. Secretary in Wisconsin who's looking to bulk up a little, pipe fitter in Miami who needs to get ready for June. It's all fine in theory, but there are so many variables it seems like we may never get the function sorted out."

"Computers," I said. "You can have em. My daddy ate beef two meals a day and skipped lunch."

Cameron made one of the closed lipped smiles that people do when they can't muster a real one.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I hope I didn't put my foot in my mouth, as were."

"Can I ask you something?" Cameron said.

"Is it about my body hair?" I said. "Because I do my best to keep it under control." "Why do you scratch behind your ear so much?"

"I don't," I said.

But he was right. I was scratching like crazy at that very moment.

"Have you ever tried walking with your hands on the ground?" Cameron said. "What?" I said. "You mean on all fours?"

"Exactly," Cameron said.

"Doesn't work for me," I said.

"How do you know if you haven't tried?" Cameron said. "Come on. I'll do it." He slid down off the chair, his back hooves first and then his front. He walked a few laps around the table.

"See?" he said. "Feels great."

"Hey, Cameron!" Jeremy said. "Looking good, buddy."

"Come on," Cameron said. "Give it a try."

"Do it," Jeremy said. "Do it. Do it. Do it."

"Fine," I said. "Stop yelling."

I stood up and looked at my hands. I've always had really short fingers, for a human. My wife says the skin on my palms is like sandpaper. She digs it, when she's in the mood. But that's not all the time. I bent over and put my hands on the ground. I've been on a handful of barroom floors in my life, usually on my back and never of my own volition. "So?" Cameron said.

I walked a few paces.

"I don't know," I said. "I feel like everyone is watching me."

"It's all in your head," Cameron said. "Look around. Half the people in this place got here on all fours."

I looked at the other patrons. Decent crowd for a Thursday night. It took me a little while to see what Cameron was talking about. I'm so used to thinking of my fellow citizens as human that I somehow failed to notice the fact of their species even as it stared me in the face. There were all kinds of animals in the Nutty Irishmen: a couple of young giraffes bent over the pool table, a school of mackerel playing hold 'em in the corner, a donkey and an elephant sitting



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shoulder to shoulder at the bar, doing shots of Fernet.

“I’m feeling a little antsy,” I said to Cameron. “You want to take a walk? Get a little air?” “Why not?”

Cameron said, “Just let me finish my wine.”

He climbed up on his stool and took up the glass and knocked it back and we headed out. I’m not sure what part of town we were in. I can’t keep track of Los Angeles. I couldn’t see where I was, couldn’t see where I was going, couldn’t see what lay ahead. I lost the context of my own existence. But it wasn’t bad. It was good, once I got used to it. Pretty soon I was running around like a wild man, sticking my nose in whatever smelled good, pissing on anything taller than me, eating whatever I could get my jaws around. Cameron ran alongside me, laughing his snorty laugh, cheering me on.

“How does it feel?” he said.

We were coming around the corner of a building. The sky had not gone fully dark but was more a sort of dark blue gradient. And there was the moon, big and round as a bowl of cream.

“Oww,” I said. “Oww oww oww.”

New to this shipment is our 2018 Red Winery Cabernet. This is a one hundred percent Cabernet Sauvignon from our Red Winery Vineyard, which was bought by my parents as a prune farm in 1972 and planted to Cabernet Sauvignon. Our other two vineyards – Pyramid and Stone – are at the very southern edge of Alexander Valley, where the hills are steeper and the weather more extreme than here in the main body of Alexander Valley, where Red Winery lies. The character of the wine at Red Winery is a reflection of this milder geography and weather – it typically lacks the kind of tannic intensity that wines from our other two vineyards achieve. Historically, it’s a wine more characterized by elegance than power.

But the 2018 vintage has proved an exception to the rule. The first thing that strikes me about it is the color – nearly opaque and closer to black than red. The aromas are dark, too: black cherry, blueberry, blackberry, violet. The first impression in your mouth is fruity and open, but the tannins close over the middle palate and dominate the finish. This is a big, gritty Cabernet with over a decade of improvement ahead of it. Drink late 2023 through 2040.

The 2018 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet, by contrast, is already an open and opulent edition of our flagship wine. As with all our wines, the Alexander Valley Estate is one hundred percent varietal. It’s a blend of all three of our estate vineyards, but is dominated by the Pyramid, which makes up more than fifty percent of the total. The nose shows cassis, fig, and dark chocolate and the palate is increasingly broad and generous. This wine has progressed a good deal in the last half year. Yum. Drink now through 2039 1/2.

My only recurring complaint about our Merlot is that there’s not enough of it. The 2019 is sourced from the same old, under-producing block on our Red Winery Vineyard as every other vintage we have produced. It’s one hundred percent Merlot and it carries all the hallmarks of the varietal and the vineyard – aroma of clove and allspice and a little cinnamon – but it’s considerably darker than it has been in past years. The palate shows black cherry and bittersweet chocolate. Exposure to new French oak was, as usual, minimal, and that helps the fruit shine through from start to finish. Drink now through 2030.

Ah, you few, you lucky few who have just received a bottle or two of our 2021 Chardonnay. This wine comes from the ranch on Chalk Hill Road and I think there may be more magic in this vineyard than in any other I have come across in my winemaking life. A lot of it is the soil – an ancient creek bed in the bow of volcanic ash. The 2021 is a surprisingly rich version of this typically lean wine. Citrus dominates the aroma and the flavor: Meyer lemon, mandarin, grapefruit. But there’s definitely a tropical layer here, too. Is that guava or passionfruit? Wowzers.

Stay well and stay in touch. And thank you, as ever, for your support. – Jake