"Let me know if you need anything Chinese," Jeremy said.

"Anything?" I said.

"I've got a back channel," Jeremy said.

"Are you smoking?" I said.

"Everybody in the underground economy smokes," Jeremy said. "I can get you a deal on a gross of the leading Chinese brand."

"What, would you say, is the leading Chinese brand?" I said.

"Nanjing," Jeremy said.

"I'm a Chunghwa man," I said. "But say I want, I don't know, a blender."

"One of those multi-blade dealies with the racist name or your standard American Graffiti model?" Jeremy said.

"Standard," I said.

"You're looking at $89.50 to one and a quarter, depending on trim," Jeremy said.

"Triple A batteries?"

"Off-brand suffice?"

"Moo Shu pork," I said.

"Can't help with the pork itself," Jeremy said. "But I can get you a gross of the pancakes at a very competitive rate."

"What is a gross?" I said.

"One hundred and forty-four units," Jeremy said.

"How about a mattress?"

"Getting a new shipment of California kings from Guangdong tonight."

"Sleeping mask?"

"Congratulations on the late onset kink," Jeremy said, "I've got a few options in natural fur I think you're to enjoy."

"Patio furniture?"

"Gorgeous matching bistro set just came in," Jeremy said, "I can knock off twenty percent if you take it in mauve."

"Remote control?" I said.

"Remote control what?" Jeremy said.

"Car," I said.

"Eighteen models in stock," Jeremy said.

"TV," I said.

"Docking station or low-end?" Jeremy said.

"Plane," I said.

"Little more limited there," Jeremy said. "Got your garden variety nostalgic biplane, of course, then a

thousandth scale F-15, F-14, F-13, and, if I remember right, a few F-11's. Out of stock on the twelve, right at the moment. You might consider moving into a chopper, I've got a little more cost-flexibility there. Huey offers the best value for dollars. Some things never change."

Jeremy lit another cigarette and coughed.

"You know what I've always wanted to try?" I said.

"Musk melon seeds?" Jeremy said.

"What's the difference between a Hami melon and a musk melon?" I said.

"Reputedly the very same melon," Jeremy said. "Both oblong, both native to Xinjiang. I haven't looked at the genetics."

He lit another cigarette.

"Baijiu," I said.

"I assume you refer to the liquor," Jeremy said.

"What else would I be referring to?" I said.

"I don't mean to patronize you," Jeremy said, "but sometimes your pronunciation is a little hard to follow."

"Your train of thought is hard to follow," I said.

"That's what they said about Zheng He," Jeremy said. "But who ended up running Nanjing?"

"I'm talking about the liquor," I said.

"Ming River is our main mover," Jeremy said. "But we've got a decent selection of your higher end options, as well."

"How about Fen Chiew 40 year?"

Jeremy narrowed his eyes.

"Are you testing me?" he said.

"Moi?" I said. "On the contrary. I'm just an innocent Chinese beverage enthusiast looking to broaden his horizons."

"We're going to have to do a hard check," Jeremy said.

"What's a hard check?" I said.

"It's an industry term," Jeremy said. "You wouldn't understand."

"Didn't I just say that?" I said.

"I'll drive," Jeremy said.

We went out and got in his car. Blue, I guess you'd call it. Or maybe black. Low to the ground. Silent. Everyone has a nicer car than me.

"This car sucks," I said.

"Your jealousy is a weeping sore," Jeremy said.

He brought the car to a stop and we got out. Los Angeles is so large and featureless that you can drive for hours and feel like you're still trapped in the same bad dream. But I guess we had been moving in the direction of the ocean, because there it was. Well, not the ocean, exactly, but like an inlet thereof – giant boats parked at a giant

pier, stacked with giant boxes being moved by giant cranes. Nearby, some giant buildings. We walked toward one of them.

Jeremy was smoking a cigarette talking on the phone and into one of those phone watches at the same time.

"A dollar sixty-nine is the lowest I can go on laptops, comma," Jeremy said to the watch, "brand of your choice, period."

When he spoke into the phone, it was in Chinese, so I couldn't tell what he was saying besides xei xei. I've heard that in movies. It means I live in fear of you or I bow to your superiority. Something a man should never say.

"Xei xei," Jeremy said. "Blah blah blah, xei xei."

It turned out we were a lot farther away from the building than I initially believed. Its scale distorted my perspective. It was cold standing in its shadow. Jeremy undid a padlock and put his back to the door and pushed and made an "are you just going to stand there?" face at me and I put my shoulder to the door and we rolled it open.

Let us pause, for a moment, to consider how much stuff there is in the world: seat cushions, motor boats, motors for motor boats, three-ring binders (yes, they still make those), bread knives, perfume bottles, swim suits. Can we stop with the swim suits? Owning more than three is an act of desperation.

Accepting that we can't know exactly how much stuff there is in the world, let's make an educated guess. Does 500 billion tons sound reasonable? Alright. If there are 500 billion tons of stuff on Planet Earth, 250 billion tons of it were in that warehouse. Roughly half the earth's stuff under a single roof.

"The lighting I hear is terrible," I said.

"I'm going to guess section 5516 E," Jeremy said.

He walked a hundred yards, turned at the end of the bank of shelving, walked, turned, turned again, walked, and stopped. He took a pair of miniature binoculars out of his pocket and put them to his eyes and looked up.

"It's no good," He said. "We're going to have to climb."

"I'm not climbing," I said.

"Suits me," Jeremy said, lighting a cigarette, "It's up there, level 9."

I looked up. I could see to level seven, everything above that was obscured by smoke.

"Fine," I said. "I'll climb."

Putting his cigarette in his mouth, Jeremy took hold of the steel shelving column and pulled himself up. I followed. Then up again. And again. On and on like that. Days might have passed or maybe minutes. I couldn't testify with any certainty. I've been told I have dyschronometria and narcissistic personality disorder, so I guess it could be related to one of those, but I've been too busy to find out what they mean.

"Don't look down," Jeremy said.

"I'm going to kill you," I said.

My head bumped into Jeremy's butt.

"Get out of my way," I said.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

"I think I found it," Jeremy said.

He climbed up a little farther and shimmied onto a pallet rack with a large wooden crate on it. I climbed up beside him.

"Are we still alive?" I said.

"Move," Jeremy said.

He leaned over and flicked his lighter and looked at the Chinese writing on the lid of the crate.

"Give me your pocket knife," he said.

I gave him my knife and watched him unfold it.

"Sorry for what I said about the lighting," I said.

He took the cigarette out of his mouth and flipped it out into the air and stuck the knife under the lid of the crate and pried it open and reached inside and started pulling out that old fashioned packing material that looks like a cross between string and straw.

"I thought this was, like, prop-filler for World Market," I said. "I didn't know it had a legitimate application."

"Raffia," Jeremy said. "Internationally recognized symbol of the exotic."

His hand came out of the crate holding a bottle.

"I believe you requested Feng Chiew Forty Year," he said.

"Baloney," I said.

"See for yourself," he said.

He flicked the lighter again and I looked.

"Satisfied?" he said.

"I think I'll need to sample it for authenticity," I said.

"Crack the seal and the bottle is yours," Jeremy said.

"Put it on my tab," I said, running my thumbnail around the neck to break the wax.

I pulled the cork and took a drink. What do you get when you cross a field of violets with a Formula One race car and a view of the earth from space?

"How is it?" Jeremy said.

"I think it's a little off," I said, taking a drink.

"Give it here," Jeremy said.

I passed him the bottle.

"That reminds me of the first time I made love to Rachel Alexander," Jeremy said.

"The horse?" I said.

"That's Rachel Alexandra," Jeremy said. "I'm talking about the dancer."

"I'm going to guess she's lesser known," I said.

"Success is not the only measure of merit," Jeremy said.

I took the bottle back and drank again. And then again.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

"So," I said. "Whose warehouse is this?"

"I don't know," Jeremy said. "Me and Tito were walking down Hollywood Boulevard the other morning and I found the key stuck in a parking meter."

"Just the key?" I said.

"Just the key," Jeremy said. "I bought Tito out of his end for twenty bucks."

"I guess that's the beginning of an explanation," I said.

We finished the bottle. Jeremy dropped it over the edge of the shelf and we listened a long time before the sound of it shattering on the floor below reached us. He opened the lid on the crate and took out another bottle and opened it.

"Do you really speak Chinese?" I said.

"Don't be an idiot," Jeremy said. "That's just this thing where me and Ed call each other and pretend to speak Chinese to intimidate people."

"It's pretty effective," I said.

"Thanks," he said.

"Do you smell something?" I said.

"I can't really smell any more because of all the smoking," Jeremy said.

"It smells like fire," I said.

"That's your cowardly imagination," he said. "Every time things get good, you smell smoke."

He flipped a cigarette over the edge.

"It's true," I said, taking a drink , "But don't we all live at the whim of imagination?"

"If not ours," Jeremy said, coughing, "then somebody else's."

"Exactly," I said.

This marks the first shipment of our **2023 Home Chardonnay**. It comes, as usual, from the ranch I grew up on, all the way at the southern tip of the Alexander Valley, on a tributary of the Russian River. It's considerably cooler down there, in the folded, fog-filled hills along the creek, than it is up here, in the open valley. The character of our Chardonnay always reflects that – it smells and tastes like it comes from somewhere cool, where the grapes keep their acidity and give the winemaker a chance to put something lean and bright in the bottle.

The 2023 smells like honeydew and lemon curd and wet slate. It was fermented in stainless steel and aged in neutral oak French barrels and did not undergo malolactic fermentation. Texturally, it feels like Chablis, which is to say focused and crisp, rather than broad and smooth. Does it make sense to describe this as a very linear wine? The acid is mouth-watering. Pairings that jump to mind: poached shrimp, frisée and citrus salad, new Manchego, evening light in the limbs of an oak tree.

This is also the first shipment of our **2020 Pyramid Cabernet**. I love this wine. It's the last of the 2020's I have up my sleeve and man, am I going to miss them. But I say the same thing every time we roll over vintages. I just like Cabernet with some years under its belt. And that's the way I tend to make it – with aging in mind.



THE HAWKES WINE CLUB

A LETTER TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

The thing I'll remember about the 2020 Cabernet vintage, in general, is its remarkable texture. I guess what I'm talking about is mostly tannic structure, but it's more than that. It's about the balance of fruit with acid and tannin and how that makes the wine feel when you drink it. There have been some vintages I loved that started out pretty jagged – the 2015, for example, which, when young, smelled like fruit, tasted like fruit, and finished like gravel. It eventually smoothed out and became some of my proudest work – one of the many surprises in my winemaking career.

I have had no such worry with the 2020 vintage. These Cabernets have always been remarkably smooth and balanced on the palate, even the Pyramid, which is capable of intensity unto roughness. These days, at nearly five years old, the 2020 Pyramid might not be ready to curl up and lie in your lap, but it's definitely ready to play nice.

My tasting notes from a few months ago read: What a monster of a wine. The vineyard hardly knows how to do anything else. Super tannic, abounding in dark fruit of all stripes – Santa Rosa plums, currants, blackberries.

Either I'm in a better mood today, which seems unlikely, or this wine has done some softening up. It's plenty tannic and still has pronounced acid on the finish, but the mid-palate is a lot more broad and generous than I last remember. Starting to open up nicely and, right at that dynamic point in its evolution where it changes over the course of an evening, preferably one that involves grilled porterhouse. Drink now through 2040.

The thing I love most about our Merlot, and what I think grabs our customers' attention, is its aromatics. This is never a brooding, closed wine, as Cabernet can be in its youth. The **2021 Estate Merlot** is one of those wines you smell from across the room when the cork is pulled – plum and blackberry and violets and white pepper. It was aged for about eighteen months in old French oak, and the influence of the barrels is minimal, leaving the fruit clear and pure. Soft at the beginning and firm at the end. Drink now through 2030.

I am drinking our **2020 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet** two or three times a day right now. It's not as powerful and tannic as the vintages on either side of it, but man, is it graceful and easy to drink. The nose is as forward and interesting as it's ever been – black cherry, cocoa, a touch of cinnamon and nutmeg. I know it's blasphemous to say a Cabernet smells like raspberry but, by God, this one does (a little).

Wait a second, all this balanced loveliness is giving Red Winery.

The 2020 Estate, like every vintage before it, is one hundred percent Cabernet Sauvignon, blended from all three of our estate vineyards. That part stays the same; what changes is the proportion of the blend accounted for by each vineyard. In 2020, Red Winery accounts for about half the total. Thus the red fruit, baking spice, high-tone aromatics and the long, beautiful texture. Drink now through 2040.

With that, my friends, I leave you. But I hope to see you soon.

Thank you for your support.

- Jake