

# Super-Taster

by

Daedalus Howell

FADE IN:

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

A lush tropical jungle. The sound of EXOTIC BIRDS comes from the canopy overhead. A single ray of sunlight falls upon the jungle floor, spotlighting a peculiar FUNGUS.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It's perhaps the most vile compound known to mankind. First discovered by Belgian botanist Pascal Faivre in 1876...

MONTAGE - THE MOST VILE COMPOUND KNOWN TO MANKIND

-- STILL -- PASCAL FAIVRE in PITH HELMET, circa 1900.

-- EXT. JUNGLE - DAY -- Natives hold their noses.

-- INT. LABORATORY -- Lab techs, test tubes, microscopes.

-- EXT. PARIS (1970s) -- Youth in bell-bottoms and berets.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

...The fungus produced a stench so appalling the natives wouldn't even give it a name. But Faivre did. Merde-mort, French for shit-death. As he wrote in his memoir -- if shit could die, this is what it would smell like. merde-mort remained the unholy grail of ethnobotanists until rumors of a weapons-grade distillate emerged in France in 1976. But where is it now?

(beat)

More when Reek Week continues on Discovery.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY LEE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

JOHNNY LEE (20s) is passed out on his COUCH as the "In Search Of" style shockumentary flickers from the TV. An ALARM buzzes. Johnny bolts upright.

CUT TO:





CONTINUED:

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
A beer bottle opener.

CLERK  
You know this is wine country,  
right?

Johnny pulls a bottle from the pack and pops the top with his molars. He reaches in his mouth for the CAP, then searches the floor He can't find it -- it's stuck to his cheek like a refrigerator magnet.

CLERK (CONT'D)  
It's on your cheek.

JOHNNY  
My fillings get electromagnetic  
from my job.

CLERK  
Sure thing, Magneto.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - EVENING

Johnny is in his piece-of-shit CAR. He's brazenly drinking a BEER. He passes a BILLBOARD that reads "Coming soon, MALVINO WINERY AND VINEYARDS" featuring a HAPPY COUPLE. After a beat, Johnny passes a CONVERTIBLE in which a pair of happy tourists, a MAN and WOMAN, clones of the billboard, paw each other at the intersection.

The girl kisses the guy as the guy notices Johnny staring. He gives Johnny a thumbs up. Johnny flips him off and lets it hang there as he turns to sip his beer. The tourists drive off and a SPORTS CAR pulls up, driven by popped-collar-douche known as RICHIE MALVINO (29) who sees Johnny's middle finger.

RICHIE  
Hey, punk! What's your problem?

Johnny catches himself and begins to choke a bit.

JOHNNY  
That wasn't meant for you.

Richie looks around the empty street.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
That was for someone else.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHIE  
So, you're giving me someone else's  
bird?

JOHNNY  
Uh, yeah.

RICHIE  
A used bird?

JOHNNY  
(trying to make light)  
Yeah, it was second hand.

Johnny raises both middle fingers, which makes things worse.

RICHIE  
You townies are freaks. Good thing  
we're buying up this shithole town  
and turning it into a real city.

JOHNNY  
Hey, I don't know who the hell you  
are or who your daddy is, but I do  
know that it's douche bags like you  
who make me wanna drive as far from  
my home town as possible.

RICHIE  
Buh-bye.

Johnny revs his engine. Puts on his turn signal. His  
frustration with himself is evident in his scowl.

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
Gettin' real far there, townie.  
That's the thing with you local  
yokels - you got no drive.

Richie peels out into the night while Johnny remains.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Johnny fumbles for his KEYS as his neighbor, CODY (20s), who  
is equal parts puppy and Rainman, pops his head out from next  
door.

CODY  
Did you read my blog?

(CONTINUED)







CONTINUED: (3)

CHELSEA

Is that true?

HOWELL

It's just conjecture on my part  
but, he is French after all.

CHELSEA

Well you wouldn't wanna swallow  
that!

(to studio camera)

Or would you?

HOWELL

That's all the time we have --

CHELSEA

No, we have time.

Howell squirms.

BACK TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - LATER

Johnny is passed out. Numerous BOTTLE CAPS stick to his  
cheeks -- he's had a few.

CUT TO

INT. FACTORY - DAY

Johnny is tonguing nine-volts. GIL (20s) staggers in with a  
BOX marked "Quarantine - Destroy" with radiation stickers on  
it. He approaches a FACTORY WORKER wearing a HELMET WITH A  
LIGHT BULB ON TOP. Everytime he touches his fingers to a  
BATTERY the bulb lights up. Like the others, he's wearing EAR  
MUFFS.

GIL

These nine volts got sent back from  
a moon base or something. They have  
to be destroyed A-S-A-P.

The Factory Worker nods though he hasn't heard a word. Gil  
leaves him the box from which he unloads nine volt batteries  
onto the conveyor belt. The batteries roll to Johnny, who's  
unaware of the rejected moon batteries trundling toward him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Something catches Johnny's eye. It's Richie Malvino, the guy from last night's car confrontation. Richie is wearing a HARD HAT and business attire as is STU (40s) who carries ARCHITECTURAL BLUE PRINTS. They move swiftly through the factory as the workers begin to take notice.

A similarly-clad older man joins them -- JULIUS MALVINO (60s). He gestures and shakes his head as Richie takes notes. Also in the huddle is the Boss. Johnny takes off his ear muffs.

MALVINO

All this is going to have to go. If we're gonna make award-winning wine.

Johnny looks as if he were socked in the gut.

RICHIE

And the pipeline?

MALVINO

What pipeline?

Malvino gives Richie the stink-eye, which soon crinkles into a wry smile.

MALVINO (CONT'D)

This place is gonna need more than a facelift. It's gonna need a whole damn face transplant before I put my name on it. They can do that now. You can buy a whole new face. Maybe you should get one, Stu.

Gil ambles up to Johnny.

GIL

Who's that? What's going on?

JOHN

Shh.

On autopilot, Johnny tests another battery, one precariously close to the contaminated batteries coming down the line.

Malvino surveys the rabble doing their various jobs.

MALVINO

And these townies. Make them gone.

(CONTINUED)







CONTINUED: (2)

CRISTA  
You still want that bottle?

Johnny belches to horror of the surrounding patrons.

JOHNNY  
Hey, that's a compliment in France.

CRISTA  
How 'bout you take it to go.

Crista bags a bottle.

JOHNNY  
What do I owe ya?

CRISTA  
Forget about it.

Johnny slides off his stool and staggers out. He clutches the bottle like a mic and croaks his best/worst Nickelback.

JOHNNY  
(sings)  
THIS IS HOW YOU REMIND ME OF HOW I  
REALLY AM! THIS IS HOW YOU REMIND  
ME OF HOW I REALLY AM!

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - NIGHT

Johnny staggers across the town square. He pulls the WINE bottle from the bag and fusses with the foil wrap on the bottle neck until he comes to the cork.

JOHNNY  
Ah, crap. It's gotta cork.

Johnny staggers further and spies, seated around a briar of roses, several rough-looking OLD WINOS. Johnny blazes into their encampment.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
Hey, you guys gotta corkscrew?

OLD WINO 1  
Sure, we do, kid. Whatcha drinking?

(CONTINUED)





CONTINUED: (3)

Old Wino 2 shoves Johnny. Johnny pushes back. Arms flail. Johnny loses his footing and the two old men beat him to the ground. Johnny rallies but -- crack! -- is overcome when Old Wino 1 hits him over the head with the bottle. Johnny is out.

A BRIGHT LIGHT flashes on the old winos, who freeze. A voice booms from the dark.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Hey!

OLD WINO 2

Scram! It's the fuzz!

The old winos scatter, leaving Johnny in a pile of broken GLASS, WINE and BLOOD. A silhouetted FIGURE emerges from the dark and hovers above Johnny.

CUT TO:

INT. WINE CAVE - NIGHT

CHARLIE LAUBE (60s) is a gnarly old coot whose matted, grey beard looks like a place where mice breed. He stirs a small fire of BARREL STAVES with a stick. Dusty, long-emptied bottles line the walls. Johnny is unconscious. On his forehead is a COMPRESS, soaked red. He wakes with a start.

JOHNNY

What the...?

He grabs his forehead head in pain and pulls off the compress, the red fluid on it gives him a start.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Am I bleeding?

CHARLIE

You were. But that's not blood. That's wine. It's an old Miwok trick. About the only good thing the Europeans brought with 'em. Wine.

JOHNNY

Who the hell are you? And where am I?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

CHARLIE

Sure. Me. Some others. S'been a little more complicated since the corporate big wigs started buying up the wineries.

Johnny attempts to rise but is woozy. Charlie fetches a WINE GLASS and wipes it with a RAG before pouring some wine into it.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Here, drink this.

JOHNNY

No, I think I've had enough.

CHARLIE

Drink it!

Johnny drinks.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Anyway, the independent winemakers, they didn't mind us down here. We were useful to them, kept guard, did some riddling. That's when you turn the bottles in the racks, like you're grabbing a pair of titties. That's where the term "rack" come from, idiot.

JOHNNY

The name's actually Johnny Lee.

CHARLIE

Anyway, the suits, they wanna flush us out like rats.

Johnny has guzzles the wine. His face brightens.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Good, isn't it?

JOHNNY

It's fucking amazing. It's the best thing I ever tasted. What is it?

CHARLIE

That, my friend, is a 1976 Hezelbach Estate cabernet. What do you taste in it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JOHNNY

What do you mean? It tastes like wine.

CHARLIE

Of course, it's wine - but every wine is made up a flavor profile. Blue berries, stone fruit, a dash of white pepper and -

JOHNNY

That's all in the wine?

CHARLIE

No, that's what the taste evokes.

JOHNNY

You mean, like a hint of, of, of -

CHARLIE

Yes?

JOHNNY

Bullshit?

CHARLIE

Okay, there's the ladder.

Johnny takes another sip.

JOHNNY

Or clove.

CHARLIE

Now we're talking.

JOHNNY

And black currant tea.

CHARLIE

We might say "cassis," but that'll do. You're better than I thought.

JOHNNY

And something, I can't quite put my finger on.

CHARLIE

Don't put your finger on it, use your tongue.

(CONTINUED)







CONTINUED:

He brushes his teeth. After a beat, he pauses, then licks his TOOTH BRUSH. His eyes search the MIRROR as he smacks his lips a few times.

JOHNNY  
Spearmint. Peppermint and high-  
impact polyhyphenate as a  
preserving agent.

Johnny scrambles for the TOOTH PASTE TUBE. He turns it over and over in his hand, reading aloud from it's packaging.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
(reading)  
Breath freshening, cavity-  
preventing...

Johnny tosses the tube and begins to rifle his GARBAGE CAN. He finds the TOOTHPASTE TUBE BOX. He reads it:

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
(reading)  
Spearmint. Peppermint and high-  
impact polyhyphenate as a  
preserving agent.  
(astonished; he looks in  
mirror)  
Yes!

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - LATER

Johnny has opened every BOX, JAR, JUG, CAN and CONTAINER of FOOD in his kitchen, which looks as if the Food Network hosted an orgy. In his hand is a NOTEBOOK covered with SCRAWL. He tears into a BOX and extracts a CORNDOG. He sniffs it, then licks it. Writes something down. Licks it again. Savors it, rolls it on his tongue -- until --

CODY  
Johnny?

Cody the neighbor stands in the kitchen doorway. Johnny tosses the dog.

JOHNNY  
Cody.

CODY  
I thought I heard someone in your  
kitchen.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CODY (CONT'D)

I figured you were at work so it must be a robber or something.

JOHNNY

It's me, Cody. In my kitchen. With my food.

CODY

Are you high?

JOHNNY

No.

CODY

I'm not even going to ask about blogging about this.

JOHNNY

Good man.

CODY

What're you doing?

Johnny leaps to his feet, leads Cody by the arm to the REFRIGERATOR and swings open the door.

JOHNNY

Pick something. Anything.  
(covers his eyes)  
Don't show me. Just pick something.

CODY

How about mayonnaise?

JOHNNY

Don't tell me! Just pick something and I'll taste it and tell you what it is.

CODY

Um. You know everyone can do that right?.

JOHNNY

But can they tell you what's in it -  
- every ingredient?

CODY

Intriguing.

Cody passes his hand in front of Johnny's covered eyes. He reaches into the depths of Johnny's fridge and exhumes an ancient jar of cornichons. He pops one in Johnny's mouth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JOHNNY

Some kind of pickle. Brined in a solution of natural spring water and three percent salt, probably iodized sea salt --

Cody reads the jar's label, nodding his head, eyes wide in amazement.

JOHNNY (CONT.) (CONT'D)

A whisper of dill, one clove of elephant garlic and a lemon rind. Oh, and a caper. Am I right?

CODY

Dead on. Okay, I got another for ya.

Cody grabs a RAMIKEN and mixes KETCHUP, MAYONNAISE and RELISH until it turns into a slurry of pink. He SPOONS a taste up for Johnny.

JOHNNY

High fructose corn syrup, pickled cucumber, vegetable oil, egg white, brown sugar, tomato paste, onion powder, salt, salt, salt and wait - is this Thousand Island?

CODY

You got the ingredients right but it's ketchup, mayonnaise and relish. Gotcha!

JOHNNY

That's what Thousand Island is, dipshit. Do you know what this means?

CODY

That we cracked the secret recipe for Thousand Island?

JOHNNY

It means that -  
(blanches)  
-- I'm going to be totally sick.

Johnny cups his mouth and looks about to hurl.

CUT TO:

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

DR. KILBURN, a mild-mannered, post-hippie country doctor, has a MAGNIFYING GLASS in one hand a PENLIGHT in the other. He is examining Johnny, who sits with his mouth agape, tongue protruding.

DOCTOR

And you never had these symptoms before?

JOHNNY

(muffled)

Ahh, noff really, nah.

DOCTOR

Interesting. It seems you have attenuated fungiform papillae on your tongue, which could account for the hyper-sensitivity.

JOHNNY

Whaaa?

The doctor steps away and returns with a CHART of the human tongue.

DOCTOR

Don't worry. It sounds worse than it is. You see on this chart here that we all have fungiform papillae on our tongues. Better known as taste buds. Some people, not a lot, an infinitesimal number really, have either enlarged buds or more than the average amount of them per square centimeter.

JOHNNY

Which do I have?

DOCTOR

Both. You're what's commonly known as a Super-Taster. Your sense of taste is enhanced several hundredfold compared to the average.

JOHNNY

Is that bad?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR

Not at all. Unless, you're eating something that tastes like crap. What puzzles me is not just the sheer amount and size of your taste buds but the fact that they've developed so late in life. Have you experienced any trauma or stress lately?

JOHNNY

I lost my job.

DOCTOR

Acute stress such as a job-loss could cause this sort of mutation. But it's pretty dramatic. Drugs?

JOHNNY

None. I drank a lot of wine last night.

DOCTOR

Wine. They say it's good for you but it's hard to believe when you're hungover.

JOHNNY

Ain't that the truth.

DOCTOR

They're better ways to get high, in my opinion. Even if the California electorate doesn't think so.

JOHNNY

Um, okay, doctor.

DOCTOR

Keith.

JOHNNY

Doctor Keith.

DOCTOR

No, just Keith. Anyway, your tongue, is fine. Hard to say what brought on your super-taster ability but the point is it won't kill you. That's good since there aren't any known treatments.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)







CONTINUED:

JOHNNY

So what's your passion? Cave dwelling?

CHARLIE

You ever wonder why I live in a wine cave?

JOHNNY

Uh, you're homeless?

CHARLIE

Far from it. I live with the wine. This is its womb. Where it gestates, where it becomes. Wine is my passion.

JOHNNY

You might've picked something more in your budget.

CHARLIE

Trust me. It's cost me everything.

JOHNNY

So, about the Sommelier Contest. I've got a secret weapon. I'm a super-taster.

CHARLIE

That's a start. But it's gonna take more than that.

JOHNNY

Training, commitment, sacrifice - whatever cliché you want, I can do it. Did I also mention I'm a super-taster?

CHARLIE

Doesn't matter. We still need a winery.

JOHNNY

A whole winery, or will the cave do?

CHARLIE

All contestants have to have a winery sponsor. It's the rules.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JOHNNY

I don't know anybody with a winery.

Charlie sighs deeply and shakes his head.

CHARLIE

I do.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEWITT CELLARS -DAY

A winery that has seen better days.

JOHNNY

Is it haunted?

CUT TO:

INT. DEWITT CELLARS - TASTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

AUDREY, a youngish, pretty, if bedraggled, proprietress polishes glasses in the quiet tasting room. A couple of other MISFIT employees scamper around, looking busy. Charlie and Johnny catch her eye. Her greeting smile disappears as she sets her jaw.

AUDREY

We're not doing charity pours today, Charlie.

CHARLIE

What about liquid donations?

AUDREY

That program has been canceled.

CHARLIE

Whistle dips?

AUDREY

I don't know what that is but if involves free wine, then no.

CHARLIE

I'm not here for free wine. I'm here to give you twenty-five thousand dollars.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

AUDREY

You know how to pick 'em, Charlie. Why don't you and your drinking buddy go scam someone else's winery. I'm too busy running this joint all by myself to deal with a coupla' townie winos.

CHARLIE

He needs training, Audrey. That's why we're here. And you're the best -- now.

AUDREY

He's here because you need a winery sponsor. Charlie, I'm nice to you because you worked for my dad. He saw something in you, lord knows what, but I'm not him and frankly you're making it difficult to see whatever that was.

CHARLIE

Do a taste test.

AUDREY

The Pepsi Challenge?

CHARLIE

Three Bottle Monty.

JOHNNY

You're making me nervous.

AUDREY

Don't worry. It'll be over quick.

Audrey gives Charlie a hard look.

INT. DEWITT TASTING ROOM - TABLE - SAME

Audrey brings three BAGGED BOTTLES to a TABLE. Charlie nods with confidence as Johnny fidgets. Audrey sets three glasses before Johnny and pours a splash of RED WINE from each bottle into each glass. Johnny gulps.

JOHNNY

Maybe this isn't such a good --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLIE  
(to Johnny)  
Close your eyes. Sip each one.

Johnny sighs. Then grabs a glass, closes his eyes and attempts to throw one back.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)  
Sip! I said sip.

Johnny sips each glass in rapid succession.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)  
Commit those flavors to memory.

JOHNNY  
Done.

AUDREY  
Done? Hmm. It'll be over quicker  
than I thought.

Audrey puts three FRESH GLASSES in front of Johnny. She re-arranges the bottles as one would in the shell game. Johnny watches vigilantly. Audrey turns her back and continues moving the bottles around -- sneaking a peek over her shoulder. She then pours a splash from each bottle into each glass.

CHARLIE  
Now, taste these.

Johnny again, tastes each one in succession -- very quickly.

AUDREY  
Which one did you taste very first?

Johnny squints and arranges the glasses.

JOHNNY  
This one was first, I know that.

AUDREY  
Now second.

JOHNNY  
I, uh, I don't know.

Charlie slaps his head.

AUDREY  
Game over. Thanks for playing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JOHNNY

Because the second and third were the same. They're the exact same wine.

AUDREY

Cute.

JOHNNY

It's true.

CHARLIE

Audrey?

Audrey glowers at Johnny and Charlie, then relents.

AUDREY

Fine, they were the same wine. Good for you -- you have short term memory.

JOHNNY

I've got more than that, babe.

AUDREY

Ego, or were you thinking that big?

JOHNNY

Try me.

CUT TO:

EXT. VINEYARD - DAY

Audrey, wringing her hands, leads Johnny and Charlie to a VINEYARD plot. GRAPES hang on the vine. Audrey picks one.

AUDREY

This is a grape. Eat it.

Johnny takes the grape and pops it in his mouth. He spits out a seed.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Charming. What's it taste like?

JOHN

A grape. But not a good one.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

You mean not a table grape.  
Different species. It's merlot.

She reaches to an opposing vine. Plucks a grape.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Now eat this one.

JOHNNY

(chewing)  
Similar. But different.

AUDREY

Yeah. The first one is merlot and  
the other is cabernet. Now, which  
wine came from which grape?

CHARLIE

Oh, come on, Audrey, he hasn't --

JOHNNY

The first wine is the merlot and  
the second is the cabernet. Is it  
always this easy?

AUDREY

One had three percent of another  
grape blended for structure - what  
was it?

JOHNNY

I couldn't tell you but does it  
have anything to do with the touch  
of Burt's Bees hand lotion on the  
first grape?

AUDREY

No. And how did you know what  
lotion I use? You tasted it before?

JOHNNY

I woke up at some chick's house and  
thought it was toothpaste.

CHARLIE

He's good isn't he?

AUDREY

He's raw. But...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHARLIE

But?

AUDREY

Fifty-fifty.

JOHNNY

You mean the prize? That's crap.  
I'm the guy who's going to win it,  
you're just the t-shirt I'll be  
wearing when I do.

AUDREY

You need us more than we need you.  
You know nothing about wine, you  
know nothing about viticulture and  
you brush your teeth with hand  
lotion.

JOHNNY

Once!

CHARLIE

Johnny, she's right.

JOHNNY

You can train me.  
(gestures to Charlie; to  
Audrey)  
He didn't even ask for a cut.

CHARLIE

I've got my own reasons. Besides, I  
can teach you all I know but Audrey  
has her father's wine library,  
which we're gonna need.

JOHNNY

You never said there's reading  
involved.

CHARLIE

They're not books, Johnny.  
(to Audrey)  
You better show him.

CUT TO:

INT. DEWITT CELLARS - WINE CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

The dim, musty cellar is limned with cobwebs. A labyrinth of shelves brimming with dusty wine BOTTLES glisten like rubies as the beam of Audrey's FLASHLIGHT passes over them. Johnny's jaw drops.

AUDREY

Wine. Going back about fifty vintages. Every varietal and most of the major producers. The sommelier championship is judged on breadth and depth. You may be able to name your grapes but you're also expected to know your wines. Remember, you're up against world-class master sommeliers. You have a natural talent but it's nothing without knowledge.

JOHNNY

So, I'm going to have to taste all these wines?

AUDREY

We'll extract samples you can taste, memorize and identify.

JOHNNY

Holy shit. I can barely remember my phone number. How can I remember a taste?

AUDREY

You shouldn't have to remember. A good wine should become part of you. It stains your soul.

(snaps out of it)

That's presuming you have one.

JOHNNY

You don't like me. And not even in that you don't like me but you're attracted to me kind of way.

AUDREY

That's not true.

JOHNNY

You're attracted to me?

(CONTINUED)





CONTINUED:

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

CODY

Tweeting that you're in training.

The people want to know.

JOHNNY

No they don't.

A VOICE emanates from the shadowy hall.

VOICE (OS)

Yes, they do, Johnny.

A figure emerges from the dark -- Daedalus Howell, the wine writer, laying on his well-practiced bonhommie.

HOWELL

Daedalus Howell, Lumaville Daily

Echo. I'm a journalist.

(laughs at himself)

Who am I fooling? I'm a wine  
writer. That's like journalist but  
less sober. And you, my friend, are  
my lead story.

CODY

Mine too.

HOWELL

(to Cody)

Stay off my beat, blogger. Your  
kind has done enough to destroy our  
industry.

(composes himself;

gestures at Johnny)

And thanks again for the tip.

CODY

No worries. We're all in this  
together.

Howell glances at Johnny who discretely shakes his head to  
allay any perception of allegiance.

CUT TO:

EXT. VINE OF THE TIMES CAFE - DAY

Establishing shot of a quaint cafe buzzing with PATRONS seated outdoors.

INT. VINE OF THE TIMES CAFE - CONTINUOUS

The place is abuzz with WAITRESSES and WAITERS, PATRONS and commotion. Johnny and Howell sit at a booth. Through the window, Howell spies an OLD MAN with a METAL DETECTOR waving it across the lawn of the Plaza.

HOWELL

Every time I pass out in the Plaza  
that sonofabitch plays finders-  
keepers with my keys.

Howell taps on the window with his key chain. Through the window the Old Man looks up and gives Howell the finger.

A matronly WAITRESS approaches.

WAITRESS

What'll it be, boys?

HOWELL

The Lumaville scramble but easy on  
the Lumaville.

WAITRESS

We stopped serving breakfast three  
hours ago.

HOWELL

Remember Pearl Harbor? It's still  
breakfast time in Hawaii, so let's  
honor their sacrifice.

WAITRESS

(rolls eyes)

And you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHNNY

I'll have the Lumaville Scramble  
too but with extra Lumaville.

HOWELL

He can have my Lumaville.

Waitress absently nods and leaves the table.

JOHNNY

Thanks.

HOWELL

Least I can do. You gotta'n  
interesting story. A local entering  
the sommelier contest. Good  
underdog angle.

JOHNNY

Why does it have to be an underdog  
story.

HOWELL

Because you're a townie. I don't  
mean that in the pejorative sense.  
It's just that --

JOHNNY

I'm a townie. It's alright. I'm  
proud of being a Sonoman, born and  
raised.

HOWELL

Yeah, got that from your pal's  
blog. And you're in training?

JOHNNY

Start today. Wait, blog?

HOWELL

Why would a master sommelier need  
to train?

JOHNNY

For starters, I'm not a master  
sommelier. I worked in the battery  
factory. Got canned. Met a wino and  
now I'm in training.

Howell rapidly jots notes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWELL

So it was a calling?

JOHNNY

I guess, you could say it was a calling.

HOWELL

Like that. Great quote.

JOHNNY

And I'm a super-taster.

Howell

(jotting; to himself)

Has good taste.

(beat)

Who's the wino?

JOHNNY

You shouldn't call him a wino - he's more of a wine enthusiast.

HOWELL

Hence, the bottle in the brown bag. If you're a rich drunk you're a wine enthusiast. If you sleep off your morning bender face-down in the Plaza, you're a wino. Got a name?

JOHNNY

Charlie Laube.

Howell smiles incredulously, shakes his head.

HOWELL

Funny, Johnny. Charlie Laube is your wino trainer. Who's your bullshit trainer? Pinocchio?

JOHNNY

'Kay, now I'm nervous. Is Charlie a whack job or something?

HOWELL

Oh, shit, you're serious. Whack job? Not at all. Well, actually, yes. But - he hasn't told your his rap? The man lives in an abandoned wine cave, you didn't think to ask why?

(CONTINUED)





CONTINUED: (5)

HOWELL

Malvino?

JOHNNY

Malvino.

HOWELL

You know him?

JOHNNY

He just bought the battery factory.

HOWELL

Typical. He made millions bottling  
plonk and selling it to rich  
shitheads. Now he buys up  
independent wineries and puts his  
name on them.

(beat)

Batteries, eh? Ambition knows no  
bounds.

JOHNNY

What I don't get is why Charlie just  
didn't keep going. Who cares if he  
didn't win a contest.

HOWELL

The man was destroyed. He was  
leveraged to the hilt, put  
everything into winning that thing -  
then gone. It was all taken away  
from him.

JOHNNY

What about the authorities? I mean  
that's cheating, right?

HOWELL

What authorities? Brother, the world  
of wine is probably the most  
cutthroat game there is. They say  
blood is thicker than water but wine  
is thicker than blood. I think Jesus  
said that.

JOHNNY

That's why they have communion.

HOWELL

And that's why they have communion.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

JOHNNY

So, this thing is kind of bigger  
than just the contest?

HOWELL

Jesus? Huge.

JOHNNY

No, I mean, everything else...

HOWELL

Oh, yeah, right. It's big. But you,  
you're the big story. You're a  
Pulitzer waiting to happen. This is  
an exclusive, right?

CUT TO:

INT. BATTERY FACTORY - DAY

The battery factory has been gutted. HARD-HAT wearing WORKERS  
lug CONSTRUCTION GEAR throughout. MALVINO and RICHIE look  
over the shoulder of STU, a small, nebbishy architect.  
BLUEPRINTS.

ANGLE ON: The PLANS - the blueprints reveal a warehouse-like  
structure with a massive and obvious PIPE protruding from the  
bottom, burrowed into the earth and leading to a TANK. Stu's  
finger traces over the drawings.

STU

And this is where the underground  
pipeline will feed into the tank.

RICHIE

The last length of pipe has been  
laid in Flagstaff, sir.

MALVINO

Good, good. Soon, cheap plonk from  
Arizona will course through the  
Southwest and Southern California,  
up the Central Valley, under the  
Bay and deep into the heart of wine  
country.

RICHIE

It's a beautiful plan, sir.

STU

Thank you.

(CONTINUED)





CONTINUED:

CHARLIE

To properly taste a wine, you must be tuned into every sense besides taste. You see it, you smell it, you feel it, you hear it -

Charlie flicks the glass with his finger - it rings out.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Wine is a totally immersive experience. To use but one sense is to offend its totality. You even use a sixth sense.

JOHNNY

You mean like psychic?

CHARLIE

You can call it that. But it's more. It's the vino veritas. The truth of the wine, which you can get hints of with your other senses but to truly understand it you must feel it from inside. Are you ready?

JOHNNY

Pour me a glass.

Charlie reaches deep into his trench-coat pocket and produces a JAR of SPICE. He quickly palms the lid and dumps its contents into Johnny's empty wine glass.

CHARLIE

Cheers.

JOHNNY

What the hell?

CHARLIE

Caraway seed. Smell it.

Charlie pushes the glass toward Johnny.

JOHNNY

I'm a super-taster. Why am I smelling anything?

CHARLIE

Your olfactory senses are interconnected. You can't have one without the other. Yin and Yang.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

We have to start with the nose to give you a vocabulary of aromas as a point of reference. Smell it.

Johnny takes a whiff.

JOHNNY

Intense.

Charlie reaches into his coat again. Comes back with a small jar with YELLOW LIQUID.

CHARLIE

You think that's intense, try this.

Johnny takes a whiff and instantly recoils.

JOHNNY

It smells like cat pee.

CHARLIE

Good, Cuz that's what I paid for.

JOHNNY

Cat pee? Why do you have cat pee?

CHARLIE

It's a necessary descriptor. Tune into the vegetal notes, the grassy hue, the -

SMASH! Broken glass rings through the tasting room. Audrey is shouting.

AUDREY

You sonofabitch! Don't you ever come back here!

Charlie and Johnny leap to their feet and turn the corner. Hovering by the door, cowering next to a huge RED SPLASH on the wall and SHARDS of a broken wine bottle at his feet, is Riche Malvino.

JOHNNY

What's going on? And what's that douche bag doing here?

AUDREY

He's trying intimidate me into selling the winery and vineyard. To Malvino.

Charlie blanches.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (4)

AUDREY

You know, I'm gonna have to charge  
you for the wine.

(beat)

I'm kidding, Johnny.

CUT TO:

INT. DEWITT CELLARS - TASTING ROOM - BEHIND COUNTER

Audrey wraps a BANDAGE around Johnny's knuckles.

AUDREY

That was rather chivalrous of you  
if a little wreckless.

JOHNNY

Sorry, I'll pay for the wine.

AUDREY

Don't worry about it. It was a  
display bottle that's been cooking  
in the window since my dad opened  
the place.

JOHNNY

If I didn't know, I wouldn't have  
pegged you as a wine brat.

AUDREY

Yeah, I was a wine brat. You think  
that means I grew up with a silver  
tastevin around my neck. Not the  
case, dude. My dad built this place  
himself, made the wine himself -  
everything. I think the only reason  
he had kids was so that we could  
pick grapes. All this is one guy's  
dream and it's my job to keep it  
alive.

JOHNNY

Where's he now?

AUDREY

Dead. Buried in the vineyard.

JOHNNY

Holy shit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

I'm kidding. He was cremated. The ashes are on Mt. Tam. Anyway, I was six units away from my degree at U.C. Davis. Viticulture and oenology. Figured I could either graduate and work for a winery or come home and make my dad's joint work.

JOHNNY

Does it make any money?

AUDREY

Hell, no. They say, to make a small fortune in wine, start with a bigger fortune.

JOHNNY

You must really love wine.

AUDREY

I really like wine but I loved him. This is all I have of him. If I didn't do this, all those summers without him while he was in the vineyards, the entire month we'd lose him during crush - all those times this place took my father away from me, it would all have been in vain. I mean, I hated this place as a kid. Now, I've gotta pay the note.

JOHNNY

That's why you want someone in the Sommelier Contest.

AUDREY

That's right, John Lee, Supertaster.

She finishes the bandage.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

That should hold for a bit. Sorry about your sex life.

JOHNNY

I'm a lefty. Anyway.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Audrey and Johnny laugh, then lock eyes momentarily. The glance lingers a bit long. Johnny moves his chin in ever so slightly and Audrey does the same. Charlie barges in, clutching an empty bottle. He's tipsy.

CHARLIE

In light of today's excitement and the fact that I've finished the wine, I suggest we convene John Lee's training in the morning. All in favor say...

Charlie belches.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Johnny strolls the gravel shoulder of the road. The Tourist Trolley is pulled over and leaning against it are a flabbergasted Tourists. Down the road a bit is a POLICE MOTORCYCLE and a HIGHWAY PATROLMAN conducting a sobriety test on the Tour Guide.

PATROLMAN

Now your A-B-C's. Backward. Starts with Z.

A little further down the road he sees a SCARECROW propped up at the VINEYARD's edge. He glances at it. It's eyes follow him. Johnny continues strolling, then stops. He paces backward and again looks at the scarecrow, which attempts to avert its face by not-so-subtly craning its neck.

JOHNNY

Gil?

The scarecrow sighs and drops its arms. Indeed, it's Gil from the battery factory dressed as a scarecrow. He's perched several feet aloft on a wooden POST.

GIL

Yeah. It's me.

JOHNNY

Dude, you're a scarecrow?

GIL

I need the job, Johnny. And don't let anyone see you talkin' to me. I don't wanna get fired.

(CONTINUED)



INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - BALCONY - NIGHT

Johnny sits on his back balcony taking in the night. He is reading SOTHEBY'S WINE ENCYCLOPEDIA. Cody appears on the balcony next door.

CODY

Yeah, so the blog is growing. Not sure if I'm going to go for market dominance then bring in a monetization scheme or continue building the brand equity and just flip it to Google.

JOHNNY

If I knew what you were talking about, I probably still wouldn't care, Cody.

CODY

I admire your modesty. Especially since the readership is deep into six figures thanks to some custom search engine optimization algorithms.

JOHNNY

If you could download me some respect around this town, then maybe I'd give a crap.

CODY

I can work on that.

The DOOR BELL RINGS.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

A woman has her back to the door. At first glance her size, shape, hair and clothes suggest it's Audrey, but she turns around - it's CRISTA, clutching a bottle of WINE. She smiles coyly.

CRISTA

Remember Norbaum Road?

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM

Johnny and CRISTA the Barista sit on the couch. Johnny drums his fingers on his thigh. Crista the Barista fusses with the wine bottle.

CRISTA  
I can't twist this off.

JOHNNY  
Cuz it twists the other way.

Crista giggles, gets serious, giggles again. She's loaded.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
Gotta say, I didn't expect you when  
the doorbell rang.  
(treading water)  
I was like, did I order pizza?

CRISTA  
I'm not the pizza guy, Johnny.  
(undoes a button on her  
blouse)  
Unless you want me to be.

JOHNNY  
Okay. Crista, it's awesome to see  
you but I have to get up early  
tomorrow and train for the  
sommelier competition.

CRISTA  
I've got a special delivery.

Crista takes her shirt off.

JOHNNY  
Can we raincheck?

CRISTA  
(incredulous)  
Who rainchecks a booty call?

The DOORBELL RINGS again.

CRISTA (CONT'D)  
Oh. You really did order pizza. I'm  
thinking threesome...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Johnny answers the door. It's Audrey. She's brought some MEDICAL SUPPLIES.

AUDREY  
Hey, thought it might be time to  
change those bandages.

JOHNNY  
Uh, wow, thanks...

Johnny tries in vain to block her view of Crista who holds a PILLOW to her bare breasts.

AUDREY  
But you're already playing doctor.

JOHNNY  
This isn't what it looks like.

AUDREY  
It's exactly what it looks like.  
Which is none of my business. You  
better take these. See you  
tomorrow, Dr. Lee.

Audrey gives Johnny the medical supplies and waves bye.  
Johnny slowly closes the door.

CUT TO:

INT. TASTING ROOM - DAY

Charlie is pounding on the COFFEE MACHINE. Audrey is crunching numbers on her LAPTOP. Johnny enters, his hat low on his forehead. He and Audrey connect eyes for a moment.

CHARLIE  
Finally, the prince is here. Who  
wants coffee?

AUDREY  
I do.

JOHNNY  
Me to, please.

Charlie trundles over and presents two MUGS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Thanks.

(sips)

Hey, this is cold, man.

CHARLIE

We can't risk burning your tongue.  
 Until the day after the contest,  
 only cold coffee for you and no  
 spicy food either.

AUDREY

You just put a taco truck outta  
 business.

(to Johnny)

How's the hand?

JOHNNY

Better, thanks. So, I just wanted  
 to tell you --

AUDREY

Save it. I'm sorry about last  
 night. I should have called first.  
 I was just passing by and thought --  
 (she spots something on  
 his cheek)  
 You have glitter on you.

JOHNNY

My neighbor Cody made me a card.  
 Apparently his Lumaville blog is a  
 hit and I'm in it or something.

AUDREY

Johnny, you don't have to cover for  
 that woman's virtue. She doesn't  
 have any. No one does, don't get  
 weird on me. We have a sommelier  
 contest to prep you for. Capiche?

JOHNNY

Capiche.

Cody bursts into the Tasting Room waving his smartphone.

CODY

News flash! I just posted this on  
 my blog.

AUDREY

What, that Johnny got laid?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CODY

No.

(to Johnny)

Was that what that was? Sounded like someone forgot to feed the corgi. Anyway, here's the news - Malvino Winery and Vineyard has entered the Lumaville Sommelier Contest.

AUDREY

What?

JOHNNY

I'm not worried about those assholes.

CODY

You should be. Malvino has hired Pierot La Fou - La Langue to be their sommelier.

CHARLIE

So, he bought himself a star? Go figure. I hope La Langue is taking a heap of Malvino's dough off him for his trouble.

JOHNNY

What does La Langue have that we don't?

AUDREY

Besides three titles and a bankroll from a wine baron?

JOHNNY

Yeah, besides all that. Really?

CHARLIE

He's French. They're different - wine has been in their blood for centuries.

JOHNNY

But I'm a supertaster.

CHARLIE

So are they. The whole damn country is tongue obsessed. I mean, they invented the French kiss.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

In fact, this guy La Langue is the Gene Simmons in a Kiss tribute band in France named French Kiss.

JOHNNY

Well, one thing I've got that they don't is the best team anyone could ask for. As god is my witness, I'm going to win this contest.

(raising glass)

To Lumaville!

Howell bursts in, reporter's NOTEBOOK in hand, panting.

HOWELL

Did you hear? La Langue is fronting for Malvino.

(sees Cody)

Don't tell me. It's already on your blog isn't it? Motherfucker.

CODY

Um, like yesterday, man.

(to Johnny)

So, Johnny, did you like the card?

Johnny flashes an "I told you so" look to Audrey.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Johnny is asleep. His CLOCK RADIO ALARM goes off. A drive-time morning show comes on.

RADIO JOCK (O.S.)

(filtered)

Good Morning Lumaville! It's going to be a beauty today - unless you're picking grapes. There's at least two planned immigration raids in the valley today, so we'll be sure to keep you posted on when and where, cuz without our illegal amigos, the wine industry might as well put a cork in it.

Johnny hits the SNOOZE BUTTON.

## MONTAGE:

A rocking TUNE blares. Johnny brushes his teeth. Gargles with bottle of WINE. Johnny puts GRAPE JELLY on his toast.

Johnny is blindfolded in front of a platoon of FILLED WINE GLASSES. Charlie, seated next to him, holds a STOPWATCH and cues Johnny who rapidly tastes the each glass.

Johnny is doing tongue pushups with a BARBELL made of a pair of CORKS and a TOOTHPICK.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

The montage continues as Audrey spits and arc of RED WINE into a SPITTOON. Johnny attempts the same but doesn't quite clear it.

Audrey spits wine on him. He spits wine on her. They start spitting wine into the air and laughing as it showers down upon them. Their formerly white clothes are soaked with red wine. They laugh hysterically.

AUDREY

You look like a tampon!

JOHNNY

I look like a tampon?

AUDREY

Like the Texas Tampon Massacre  
meets Petit Verdot.

JOHNNY

What do you think you look like?

AUDREY

Pretty hot. I bet.

JOHNNY

Hot like "Carrie."

AUDREY

Wanna get drunk?

JOHNNY

We're going about it the wrong way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Audrey guzzles some wine and lets it run out of her mouth as she says -

AUDREY  
You think I have a drinking  
problem?

Johnny takes a swig and follows suit.

JOHNNY  
I can quit anytime.

Audrey does a spit take and laughs.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
Ahh. You got some in my mouth.

Audrey moves in.

AUDREY  
So, what's wrong with that.

JOHNNY  
If I'm going to have your saliva in  
my mouth I'd rather -

Audrey plants her lips on his. Johnny, at first taken aback, goes for it, then completes his thought.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
-- kiss you.

AUDREY  
Then shut up and kiss me.

They embrace, slurp and grope. She wraps her legs around his body and hoists herself up while pulling her shirt off. Johnny does his best not to topple over by planting her butt on the kitchen counter. He misses and the two topple down in a hail of laughter. They recover and stabilize themselves against the wall - THUD! The montage MUSIC swells.

CUT TO:

INT. CODY'S APARTMENT - SAME

Cody's apartment is a mirror reflection of Johnny's, except it's decorated like a ComiCon clearance sale. Cody is at his COMPUTER wearing EARBUDS. Another THUD comes through the wall. A STAR WARS ACTION FIGURE balanced on his MONITOR falls off. He plucks out an earbud and listens.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He hears the raucous LAUGHTER of Johnny and Audrey and nods, approvingly before replacing the earbud. He starts typing with a shit-eating grin on his face.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - SAME

Audrey bites her lip in ecstasy and grips her PILLOW as Johnny emerges from under the covers.

CUT TO:

EXT. VINEYARD - MORNING

Gnarled old VINES are arrayed neatly on TRELLISES, spanning deep into the distance. The SUN rises over a distant hill. BIRDS chirp. A RUST-colored vineyard DOG chases a SQUIREL into a TREE, huddled around which are a cadre of disheveled MIGRANT WORKERS.

They're listening intently to Richie who is being translated into Spanish by the VINEYARD MANGAGER.

RICHIE

(awkward)

Ola, mi amigos. I am Richie Malvino and welcome to the Malvino Vineyard and Winery family.

VINEYARD MANAGER

(in Spanish; subtitled)

Hello, I'm the son of the asshole who bought this vineyard. I am also an asshole as you can see from my shirt.

The migrants nod and smile. Richie nods to the vineyard manager and proceeds.

RICHIE

As vineyard workers you have maintained a valued tradition in Lumaville, one that we the Malvinos also respect.

VINEYARD MANAGER

We intend to exploit your cheap labor and use your fear of deportation to keep you docile and compliant. And we are assholes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The migrant workers can barely stifle their laughter. Some cover their mouths, another pulls a HAT over his face.

RICHIE

However, we do things a little differently. For example, you won't be picking grapes. Instead, you will laying a pipeline that will pump wine from another location to be bottled here.

VINEARD MANAGER

Not only will be exploiting you for manual labor, we will be deceiving our consumers. And I have an extremely small penis. Even for a white guy.

The migrants bust up. Richie turns his quizzical eyes to the Vineyard Manager.

RICHIE

Why are they laughing?

VINEYARD MANAGER

They are full of joy for not having to pick grapes.

One migrant makes a "small" gesture with his hands and points at Richie.

RICHIE

What's that guy saying?

VINEYARD MANAGER

He's asking how big the pipe will be.

RICHIE

How do you say very large?

VINEYARD MANAGER

Mi pene es tan pequeño que orinar sentado.

RICHIE

(in Spanish; subtitled)

My penis is so small I pee sitting down.

The migrants howl with laughter. One rolls on the ground.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VINEYARD MANAGER

They say this is tremendous news.

(pointing)

That man is showing his love for  
the company by rolling his body on  
its beloved land.

RICHIE

Excellent. Now please ask a couple  
of them to fetch a couple of cases  
of wine from the cave and bring  
them to my office.

VINEYARD MANAGER

(in Spanish; subtitled)

Who wants to get drunk?

Two guys, RODRIGUEZ and GUITERIZ raise their hands.

VINEYARD MANAGER (CONT'D)

Go to the cave and have a blast.

See you tomorrow.

Rodriguez and Guteriz nod and hustle up to Richie and take  
his hands in theirs.

RODRIGUEZ

(in Spanish; subtitled)

There are ways you can compensate  
for your small penis.

GUITERIZ

(in Spanish; subtitled)

Like being a big asshole.

VINEYARD MANAGER

They say, thank you for the  
opportunity to serve you and  
blessed be the Malvinos.

CUT TO:

INT. TASTING ROOM - DAY

Johnny is garbed like a tasting room worker, WHITE SHIRT,  
APRON.

AUDREY

Today, you play wine steward.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLIE

That's French for sommelier.

AUDREY

Tourists come up with the most evocative, strange and downright stupid questions about wine. We're going to see how you answer them and whether your answers are stupider than the questions.

JOHNNY

What if I give a stupid answer.

AUDREY

Tourists will never know.

CHARLIE

But we will.

AUDREY

Just be polite, ask them what you could pour for them and do your best.

CUT TO:

INT. TASTING ROOM - DAY

This is baptism by fire - or at least wine. Johnny stokes his resolve behind the counter by sniffing a WINE CORK as if it were Hercules' garlic. Audrey turns the "Closed" sign to open. The doors open and a HORDE of FANNY-PACK clad TOURISTS enters.

A tourist in a T-shirt emblazoned "If you think I'm inbred, check out my kids" bellies up to the counter, his fanny pack landing on the surface with a thud.

JOHNNY

Welcome to Lumaville. What can I pour on you? I mean, for you.

TOURIST

Well, wine. That's why we're here, ain't it? Honey, what's the kind of wine do I like?

GLYNIS, a woman in a matching FANNY PACK, is examining wine-themed TCHOTKES like a JUMPING JACK CORKSCREW decorated like a nude man. She waddles over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GLYNIS  
Infidel.

JOHNNY  
Zinfandel?

Johnny pulls the cork on a bottle of ZIN and pours a GLASS.

TOURIST  
It's the wrong color. It's red.  
Infidel is a white wine.

JOHNNY  
Actually, no it's...

TOURIST  
This zin must be made from red  
grapes. The one I like is made from  
white grapes.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)  
(French accent)  
That is a common misconception. The  
juice from the grape is clear. It  
gets color from being left on the  
skins during fermentation.

TOURIST  
Well, I'll be...

The accented voice has caught Audrey's attention. She sidles up to Johnny.

AUDREY  
(to Johnny)  
Omigod. That's him. That's La  
Langue.

La Langue, in the flesh, smooths his hair.

TOURIST  
(to La Langue)  
Seems like you should be behind the  
counter instead of this guy.

LA LANGUE  
No thanks. I have -- how do you  
say? -- a life.

Johnny puts a GLASS in front of La Langue. He snorts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JOHNNY

Can I get you a taste of something?

LA LANGUE

What's the point?

AUDREY

Of a tasting? To taste wine. I'm assuming that's why you're here. La Langue.

LA LANGUE

If you know my name, then you know that I would not come to California for wine. Let alone this pissoir you call Lumaville. I'd rather drink from a urinal.

JOHNNY

Men's room is that way.

LA LANGUE

I come to Lumaville to win. You know how to spell "win" don't you? It's like "wine" without the "e."

(considers)

Unless it's in French. Then it's "vin" with a "w" instead of a "v." Which is for "victory."

JOHNNY

You spell so good. Too bad we're not in a spelling bee. Might stand a chance of winning.

LA LANGUE

I always win.

AUDREY

Is that win with a "v" or "w"?

LA LANGUE

That's win with a vengeance. I've heard about you, John Lee, super-taster. Like everyone in France, I read Cody's blog. It's a pity that I will have to shame you in your hometown. Perhaps when I'm done, you can go back to your battery job.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JOHNNY

He put that in the blog?

AUDREY

So are you here to concede defeat?  
That's what the French do, right?

LA LANGUE

So, this is your family winery? If  
you please, super-taster.

Johnny splashes wine in La Langue's glass. La Langue holds it to the light, swirls it, smells it, eyeballs the drips within the glass, swirls it again, takes a sip, swishes it around his mouth, loudly gargles it, then spits into a SPIT BUCKET in a perfect arc.

LA LANGUE (CONT'D)

Just as I expected. Green,  
unrefined, tawdry and cheap. But  
serves it's purpose I suppose. Like  
its proprietess, I suspect.

La Langue lewdly tongues the rim of his glass.

JOHNNY

(to Audrey)

I'm pretty sure he just offended  
you, I think.

LA LANGUE

I don't suspect that you would know  
the difference, super-taster. It's  
probably the best you have ever  
had. C'est dommage.

Johnny moves to strike La Langue but Audrey stops him.

AUDREY

He's not worth it.

Johnny steams as La Langue pours the wine remaining in his glass onto the floor. Johnny struggles with Audrey clutching his arms.

LA LANGUE

Au revoir.

JOHNNY

Au revoir back to you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

AUDREY  
That means good-bye.

JOHNNY  
I knew that.

La Langue makes a lewd gesture with his tongue as he passes through the door.

CUT TO:

INT. MALVINO HEADQUARTERS - MALVINO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

An old school corporate lair. Malvino is seated at huge desk, pouring over PLANS. Richie hovers nearby.

RICHIE  
The pipeline should be ready to activate the day after tomorrow and then bottling of Sonoma's finest wine - with one-hundred percent less Lumaville -- will commence.

MALVINO  
Richie, there's a reason you're not in public relations, you do realize this, don't you? You've got no spin, kid.

RICHIE  
But I designed the world's only interstate wine pipeline without so much as waking a gopher. Soon, we can have pipelines coming in from all over the nation and someday the world. We can keep inflated Lumaville wine country prices with the cheapest plonk made on earth.

Malvino rolls his chair back from his desk, appraises Richie with admiration.

MALVINO  
I admire your ambition, son. It reminds me of my own. But we need a local face. Someone who the people can gather around and integrate the Malvino brand into the town with a sense of ownership.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALVINO (CONT'D)

If I had any foresight, I would've sent you here as a kid to be raised in this cultural desert.

RICHIE

Like Luke on Tatooine.

MALVINO

Or worn a goddamn condom. Now go find me a Sonoman, Richie.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S CAVE - NIGHT

Charlie pours Johnny a GLASS of wine.

CHARLIE

It's no Chateau Neuf de Pape but it'll do. I'm proud of you Johnny. You've come a long way. But there's still a long way to go.

JOHNNY

You really think I can win this thing? The competition seems pretty tough.

CHARLIE

You may find that the one you have to compete with most is yourself. You have to beat your own doubts, trust your instincts and expect the unexpected. You never know what weird shit might come out of the blue.

JOHNNY

Emphasis on shit, right?

CHARLIE

(chuckles; then serious)  
How do you mean?

JOHNNY

The shit-death. The merde-mort - that's what happen to you, right?

Charlie stares hard at Johnny. Then grabs him by the collar and gets in Johnny's face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLIE

Who told you about the merde-mort?

JOHNNY

Hey, cool off, man. Howell, the wine writer told me.

CHARLIE

Told you what?

JOHNNY

That at the Paris Tasting someone contaminated your wine with merde-mort so it was disqualified.

Charlie releases Johnny's collar.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You never told me you were a winemaker.

CHARLIE

I was. I was a great winemaker. Until I was betrayed by my partner. He was jealous his name wasn't on the bottle. Didn't suit his ego to be a silent partner. And if he couldn't have it - no one could. It wasn't the merde-mort that destroyed my dreams. It was a name.

(beat)

Malvino.

A CRASHING SOUND. Johnny and Charlie leap to their feet. Two men emerge in the dark. It's Rodriguez and Guteriz.

RODRIGUEZ

Hola?

GUITERIZ

Lo siento!

CHARLIE

You lost?

Rodriguez and Guteriz gesture to their ears - they don't understand.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Um, perdido?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RODRIGUEZ

Si, si.

GUI TERIZ

Mui perdido.

Charlie points down the cave hall.

CHARLIE

Alrighty. Go that way. Then left.  
Uh, marchado.

RODRIGUEZ

Marchado. Si, gracias.

GUI TERIZ

Gracias.

The men disappear into the dark.

JOHNNY

That was weird.

CHARLIE

All the tunnels interconnect.  
During Prohibition winemakers could  
roll barrels to wineries certified  
to make sacramental wine.

JOHNNY

Yeah, yeah, you told me that. Seems  
like a lotta trouble to look legit.

CHARLIE

Yeah, but it's what's in the bottle  
that counts. A good wine, you taste  
with your heart. But the truth --  
for that you use your heart. Even  
if it tastes like shit.

CUT TO:

EXT. VINEYARD - DAY

Daedalus Howell, reporter's notebook in hand, strolls through  
a vineyard with Gil, who is still dressed as a scarecrow.

HOWELL

How long has this been happening?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GIL

Just about two days. I'd be working over there...

HOWELL

On that cross?

GIL

...Yeah and then, like a miracle, it would just start bubbling up. Red liquid. First, just a trickle Then a little more, then it would leave a shallow puddle and dry up.

HOWELL

Uh-huh. And you're up there without any shade all day? You wear a hat or anything?

GIL

I wear a scarecrow hat.

HOWELL

Yeah, I can see that. Smoking dope?

GIL

(earnest)

I know how it sounds but I swear, I've seen it happen.

HOWELL

You've watched the earth bleed? Listen, I didn't come here for a quote from the Passion of the Scarecrow. I'm looking for a story. Now if the Tinman and Lion have a threesome with Dorothy -- that's a story -- call me.

GIL

There it is!

Gil breaks away and speeds to a PUDDLE of deep red liquid springing from the dirt. Howell follows.

GIL (CONT'D)

Now do you believe me?

HOWELL

Sure, I believe you but it's not blood.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Howell reaches a finger into the puddle. He tastes it.

HOWELL (CONT'D)

It's wine. Really, crappy wine.

GIL

That makes sense, it grows here.

HOWELL

No, Gil. Grapes grow here, the wine is made in a winery. But this, this doesn't taste Californian. I don't know what it is but it seems like it must be coming from some sort of pipe system. But why would you be piping wine way out here? There's no winery for miles.

GIL

Maybe they're piping it to the winery.

HOWELL

Why would you pipe wine to a winery, Gil? That's like bringing a sand to the beach.

GIL

(sagely)

Which is easier than bringing an ocean to a sandbox.

HOWELL

I know you think that sounds like some Zen shit but it's really just meaningless. Don't you have a crow to scare or something?

Gil slumps his shoulders scampers off, shedding hay as he goes.

HOWELL (CONT'D)

(to himself)

But if you wanted to have an ocean in your sandbox how would you...

What am I thinking?

(something clicks)

Wait a minute...

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Johnny is driving his piece-of-shit CAR. He's spiffed up, wearing something that resembles a BLAZER. On the seat next to him are FLOWERS. He's singing to the RADIO when suddenly it turns off. Then the HEADLIGHTS go out, then the engine cuts out. Johnny limps the car to the side of the road. He pops the hood and hops out and inspects the engine.

JOHNNY  
 Piece of crap Lumaville  
 Goddamn battery factory!

Another CAR pulls up along side him and BEEPS the HORN.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)  
 Need a jump?

JOHNNY  
 Yeah, I think the battery is -

The car pulls forward. It's driven by Richie.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
 Dead.

RICHIE  
 Or how about a ride? I know someone  
 who wants to see you. My dad.

JOHNNY  
 Tell him I already have a date.

RICHIE  
 There's a battery in it for you.

Richie opens the passenger door of his car. Johnny reluctantly slams the hood down.

CUT TO:

EXT. MALVINO WINERY - LATER

Establishing shot of the former battery factory, transformed into a modern winery. A MONUMENT SIGN that reads "Malvino Family Winery and Vineyard."

CUT TO:

INT. MALVINO WINERY - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Johnny is clearly in awe of the luxurious transformation of his former battery factory. The décor is classy but rustic and feature STONE WALLS and a BRUSHED GRANITE FLOOR. A FOUNTAIN of WINE is GURGLING in the entry way. A CHANDELIER made of BARREL STAVES is suspended from the ceiling.

RICHIE  
Impressive isn't it?

JOHNNY  
It doesn't smell like industrial waste, I'll give you that.

RICHIE  
Father is waiting for you through there.

Richie gestures toward an ornately-carved, heavy WOODEN DOOR. Johnny hesitates a moment, then pushes through.

CUT TO:

INT. MALVINO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Malvino is behind his desk. He takes Johnny in for a moment, then smiles.

MALVINO  
Sit down, Mister Lee. I'm Julius Malvino. Welcome to my winery.

Johnny drops himself into an overstuffed chair.

JOHNNY  
Uh, thanks.

MALVINO  
I should apologize for the circumstances of our first meeting.

JOHNNY  
You mean, when you fired me?

MALVINO  
Oh, I'm not apologizing for that. I'm just sorry that I didn't recognize then how similar we are.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHNNY

If you did, you'd have to fire you too.

Malvino laughs.

MALVINO

You know, I was also born and raised in a small town. I was the quintessential local guy. Passion, just enough smarts. And it all would have been wasted if I hadn't been given an opportunity.

Johnny shifts in his seat.

JOHNNY

With all due respect, sir, I have date to get to.

MALVINO

You puzzle me, Mister Lee. You're better than this town but you don't leave. Are you waiting for the world to come to you?

Malvino reaches to the top of a SHELF and grabs a bottle of WINE. He uses a techno-geek CORKING DEVICE affixed to his desk to instantly uncork it. He pours two GLASSES of wine. Johnny fixes his eyes on the old man. They grow narrower as he speaks.

MALVINO (CONT'D)

That won't happen without opportunity. Need a place high up where you can shine, be noticed.

JOHNNY

Um, yeah. Not in Lumaville.

MALVINO

Is that so, Mr. Lee?

Malvino pushes a glass of wine toward Johnny, who accepts it with trepidation.

JOHNNY

Just Johnny is fine.

MALVINO

Smart guys like us, we're like a fine wine.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MALVINO (CONT'D)

Open it too early and its brash,  
tight, no good. Open it too late  
it's vinegar. It's about  
recognizing the right opportunity  
at the right time.

Malvino sniffs wine and takes a sip.

MALVINO (CONT'D)

Now, this wine. This was the  
perfect time to enjoy it. Go on,  
don't be shy.

Johnny takes a long sip of the wine. He stares at Malvino.

JOHNNY

This is a 1989 Chateau Neuf de Pape  
isn't it? I've never had it before  
but I can tell from the -

MALVINO

White pepper.

JOHNNY

It's legendary. According to the  
trades, the last lot sold at  
auction for a bajillion dollars.  
There's only forty bottles left in  
existence.

MALVINO

Thirty-nine.

JOHNNY

Holy shit.

MALVINO

No, that's what the Pope drinks.  
This is better. And there's plenty  
like it here. You see, Mister Lee,  
I need an ambassador, a Malvino  
brand ambassador who can be our  
face to Lumaville and Sonoma's face  
to the world. Think what that could  
mean for you and your friends. You  
sure could help them out. You'll  
have a salary, an office, staff, an  
expense account, per diem. But most  
of all, Mister Lee, you'll have  
respect.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JOHNNY  
 (to himself)  
 I could help out a winery that's in  
 trouble. Or something.

MALVINO  
 You could buy a winery.

Johnny catches himself. He puts his glass down.

JOHNNY  
 Is that what you did to Charlie  
 Laube?

Malvino smiles, impressed with Johnny's move.

MALVINO  
 Poor old Charlie. A very talented  
 man. Too talented.

JOHNNY  
 How do you mean too talented?

MALVINO  
 Charlie was good at making wine.  
And good at drinking it. Until he  
 wasn't. Back in seventy-six, he  
 could have swept the Paris Tasting,  
 he could have swept it.

Malvino pulls a framed PICTURE from the shelf. In it is a  
 much YOUNGER CHARLIE and a MUCH YOUNGER MALVINO.

MALVINO (CONT'D)  
 But the bottle he brought was  
 corked. That's why you bring more  
 than one. But Charlie didn't have  
 another. He drank them all in the  
 hotel room.

Malvino tops off Johnny's glass.

JOHNNY  
 Thanks. But what about the...

MALVINO  
 Merde-mort? Sad isn't it? Who makes  
 up something like that?  
 (off the picture)  
 Yep. Those were happier days.

Johnny lets this sink in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

JOHNNY

Um, in this deelio we've been discussing, is there a company car?

MALVINO

Of course. Take Richie's car. Welcome aboard.

Malvino and Johnny clink glasses.

MALVINO (CONT'D)

You start Monday. Richie will get you squared away.

JOHNNY

There's just one thing. What about the sommelier contest?

MALVINO

Forget the contest. You're already a winner.

JOHNNY

Thank you, sir.

MALVINO

No, thank you, mister...  
(catching himself)  
Just Johnny.

CUT TO:

EXT. MALVINO WINERY PARKING LOT - LATER

Johnny is in the driver's seat of Richie's car. He toots the HORN as he pulls away, leaving Richie in a plume of dust.

CUT TO:

INT. VINE OF THE TIMES CAFE - NIGHT

The local brasserie bustles with WAITERS and WAITRESSES carry trays of sumptuous California cuisine. Audrey, looking very pretty with her hair up is already seated drinking a glass of wine. Johnny enters through the front door, is greeted by the MAITRE 'D as his eyes search the eddies of FACES in the restaurant. He sees Audrey and zips over, the FLOWERS behind his back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHNNY  
Sorry I'm late. These are for you.

AUDREY  
Ahh, thanks, Johnny.

She takes a big whiff.

AUDREY (CONT'D)  
You can stick your nose in wine all day but there's nothing like a real bouquet.

The WAITRESS approaches their table.

WAITRESS  
Can I start you two off with a drink, a glass of wine perhaps?

JOHNNY  
How 'bout a bottle?  
(to Audrey)  
You order.

AUDREY  
Any Lumaville Valley petit verdot.

WAITRESS  
We have...

AUDREY  
The most expensive.

WAITRESS  
My kind of girl.

The waitress scurries off smiling.

AUDREY  
So, you ready for the big day?

JOHNNY  
Monday?

AUDREY  
No, the contest. What's Monday?

JOHNNY  
Oh, right. My mind's swirling right now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUDREY

That's why you shouldn't taste wine  
without a spit bucket.

JOHNNY

No, it's something else. I, um,  
it's kind of weird actually. I got  
a job.

AUDREY

(quizzical)

Hmm. That's interesting. Tell me  
you're not taste-testing batteries  
again.

JOHNNY

No, it's not that. It's something  
that's going to allow me to help  
you with your winery, with the  
money.

AUDREY

You're already helping, Johnny.  
With the contest.

JOHNNY

Sure, but I mean really help.

AUDREY

You're beginning to scare me.

JOHNNY

I've got an opportunity that a guy  
like me, a townie, probably  
wouldn't get otherwise.

AUDREY

Indoor plumbing?

JOHNNY

I'm a brand ambassador. For  
Malvino.

AUDREY

(shrieks)

What?!

The restaurant PATRONS crane their heads toward them.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

How the hell is that supposed to  
help me?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

AUDREY (CONT'D)

You're working for the competitor.  
An evil competitor. Tell me you're  
joking.

JOHNNY

Audrey, you have to have an open  
mind. Malvino isn't that bad. You  
see, they need a local face, a guy  
who can be their...

AUDREY

Their puppet, Johnny. You dumb  
townie bastard. You have to go back  
and tell him to shove it. Now! Tell  
him you have a conflict of  
interest.

JOHNNY

What? The sommelier contest?

AUDREY

Me, Johnny. I'm your conflict of  
interest.

JOHNNY

Audrey, I'm doing this for you.

AUDREY

No, you're not. You're doing this  
for you because you are a selfish,  
lazy asshole who's trampling his  
friends for a shortcut to ego  
gratification.

JOHNNY

I thought you'd be proud of me.

AUDREY

Are you insane? Did you ever stop  
and think about how this might  
affect me or Charlie or even Cody?  
People believe in you Johnny, we  
need you.

JOHNNY

No, you need a show pony to win a  
contest for you. Well, I'm better  
than that. If you guys are  
satisfied being small town and  
small time your whole lives, you  
can have your goddamn contest. And  
fuck Lumaville!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

AUDREY  
Bite your tongue, Jonathan Lee!

Johnny storms out as tears streak Audrey's cheeks.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - MORNING

Howell darts across the Plaza, dodging KIDS, PICNICKERS and WORKERS installing a huge BANNER that reads "Lumaville Sommelier Competition." Finally, he spies his quarry - the Old Man with the metal detector.

HOWELL  
Hey, Sal. I'll make you a deal.  
Trade you my keys to borrow that  
thing for half an hour.

The old man nods and Howell tosses his keys to him, trots up and snags the metal detector. Victorious, the old man shakes the keys in his triumphal fist.

CUT TO:

EXT. VINEYARD - LATER

Standing near the drying puddle of wine, Howell waves the metal detector around until it SQUEALS. He waves it again. Another SQUEAL. He moves forward a pace. Another SQUEAL. He's on the right track. After a few paces, a VOICE startles him

GIL (O.S.)  
Did you find your keys?

Gil is hanging on his scarecrow cross.

HOWELL  
No, you idiot. I'm tracking the  
wine pipeline.

GIL  
Can I come with?

HOWELL  
Aren't you on the clock?

GIL  
No, I got off half an hour ago.  
This is also my hobby.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWELL

Okay, you can come with but I'm not sharing a byline.

Giddy, Gil jumps of his perch.

CUT TO:

EXT. MALVINO HEADQUARTERS - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

The parking lot is full of SEDANS with ARIZONA PLATES. Howell, with METAL DETECTOR, and Gil the Scarecrow duck behind a car.

HOWELL

The pipeline must continue into that building. But where is it coming from?

Gil points his Scarecrow hand to the Arizona plate on the car.

HOWELL (CONT'D)

Arizona? Arizona! Holy shit, Scarecrow! Malvino is pumping cheap bulk wine from Arizona and bottling it in Lumaville so he can charge top dollar.

GIL

But that will ruin Sonoma's reputation.

HOWELL

When we see the Wizard, I'm gonna make sure you get a real brain. You've earned it.

CUT TO:

INT. MALVINO WINERY - JOHNNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A RECEPTIONIST taps on Johnny's door and enters.

RECEPTIONIST

They're ready for you, Mr. Lee.

Johnny nods.

CUT TO:

INT. MALVINO HEADQUARTERS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny walks down the long hall of the offices. A WORKER is hanging a FRAMED POSTER of the "Happy Couple" emblazoned with "Malvino World Enterprises, Inc. Loves Lumavile." The typo catches Johnny's eye.

JOHNNY

You know, Lumaville is spelled wrong.

The worker shrugs.

CUT TO:

EXT. LUMAVILLE DAILY ECHO - DAY

Howell approaches the newspaper building, NOTEBOOK in hand. He pauses. Looks at his watch and bolts down the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. CODY'S APARTMENT - DOOR - LATER

Howell beats on Cody's door.

HOWELL

Come on, wake up, you blogger.

The latch finally turns and Cody opens the door.

CODY

Doing your paper route?

HOWELL

I've got a story for you. It's big.

CODY

The blog is over. Johnny Lee joined the evil empire. Malvino.

HOWELL

Forget Johnny Lee. I've got something so big it's gotta break now. You're the only person I trust to get it out there.

CODY

I can't believe you said that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWELL

Neither can I. But what I got is bigger than you and bigger than me and might just save Lumaville.

CODY

Get in.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Johnny sits at his COMPUTER, on the screen is Cody's BLOG, "SonomaWinos.com." Johnny's MUG SHOT is prominently displayed as is the HEADLINE: "Betrayed!" Beneath that, is a teaser that reads: "Tomorrow's Exclusive: WinoGate!" Johnny sighs and turns off the computer.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Johnny is asleep. His CLOCK RADIO ALARM goes off. The drive-time morning show comes on again.

RADIO JOCK (O.S.)

(filtered)

And we're off! Good Morning Lumaville! The Lumaville Sommelier Contest kicks off in high-fashion today with the ritual blessing of the grapes. Father Murphy will preside this year as Father O'Carroll has fled to a non-extradition country. The Tongue-Tacular taste-off begins at...

Johnny hits the SNOOZE BUTTON.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - LATER

Johnny has put on a WHITE BUTTON-DOWN SHIRT and is tying a TIE. He squints in the MIRROR, then down at his shirt. Sure enough, there's a WINESTAIN on it -- over his left side..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He sighs and finishes knotting the tie and positions it over the stain. The stain still shows over his heart. He rips of the tie.

CUT TO:

INT. WINE CAVE - DAY

Charlie is also grooming himself. He trims his beard, brushes off an old coat and slips it on. He slicks his hair in a small, cracked then plucks a wine BOTTLE from a shelf. The label reads "In case of emergency, break glass." He shoves it in a pocket and leaves with a SUITCASE.

CUT TO:

EXT. LUMAVILLE BRIDGE - DAY

An old bridge spanning Lumaville River -- a lethally long ways down. Charlie sits on the edge dangling his feet, his suitcase next to him and his "emergency bottle" in his hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - DOORWAY

Johnny is hurriedly locking up. Cody peeks at Johnny from his own door. The two lock eyes.

CODY

Aren't you gonna be late for your corporate sell-out job?

JOHNNY

Damn straight, I'm late.

(beat)

I gotta Sommelier contest to win.

CODY

(elated)

What?!? You mean you're going? I've got to update my blog. So, Johnny still want me to download some respect for you?

JOHNNY

Nah, I'm going to go out there and earn it like everyone else.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
 With my tongue. But there's  
 something I gotta do first.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - DAY

The contest is in full swing. A CROWD has formed and vendors are selling everything from TIE-DYE SHIRTS dyed with wine SHIPS IN WINE BOTTLES. Chelsea, the anchorwoman, clutches a MIC while her CAMERA CREW endures.

CHELSEA

Every time you think it's the last time but like herpes, the Lumaville Sommelier Contest re-infects the town with plenty of excitement. Speaking of exciting...

Chelsea pulls a reluctant Howell into her shot.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

I have Mr. Excitement himself, wine writer Daedalus Howell. What's the scoop, handsome?

HOWELL

It's going to be an exciting day. Historical, in fact. And you can read all about it in very soon on my new blog, SonomaWinos.com.

CHELSEA

You know what I like to do online?

HOWELL

Look, the mayor is talking.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - AMPITHEATER - DAY

MAYOR (50s) is onstage in an amphitheater. Behind him are several seated SOMMELIERS each wearing a SASH with a different winery name on it. La Langue sits with his arms akimbo. His sash reads "Malvino." Also onstage is Audrey wearing a sash the reads "DeWitt."

MAYOR

Welcome to the Lumaville  
 Sommelier Contest.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAYOR (CONT'D)

We have several contestants sponsored by our esteemed local wineries with a twenty-five thousand dollar prize in the offering. May the best tongue win!

The crowd cheers! Among them are the Human Wine Bottle, the Waitress from Vine of the Times, Johnny's Doctor, Gil the Scarecrow and other personalities we've seen throughout.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - AMPITHEATER - DAY

La Langue leans over to Audrey.

LA LANGUE

Where's your boyfriend?

Audrey ignores him.

LA LANGUE (CONT'D)

Cat got your tongue? It's entertaining that you're here. It's good for the crowd to see more people get beat before I win. Again.

AUDREY

You know what your problem is?

LA LANGUE

I'm an arrogant sonofabitch with a ridiculous accent.

AUDREY

Okay. Besides that. You're a mercenary -- you're just a hired gun, sold to the highest bidder.

LA LANGUE

What can I say? They want the best and they can pay for it.

AUDREY

Like a whore.

LA LANGUE

How do you pay, Johnny?

AUDREY

I don't pay, Johnny.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LA LANGUE  
Then who is the whore?

La Languie laughs as Audrey stews.

CUT TO:

INT. WINE CAVE - DAY

Johnny hops through the portal into Charlie's cave.

JOHNNY  
Charlie? Charlie?

Johnny nearly trips over an empty box. There's nothing left.  
Charlie is long gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - DAY

Johnny sprints through the Plaza but stops when he finds  
himself facing off with Richie near the ampitheater.

RICHIE  
Aren't you late for work? What are  
you doing here?

JOHNNY  
I'm here to win the Lumaville  
Sommelier Contest.

RICHIE  
We've already got our guy. La  
Languie.

In the background, La Languie sticks his tongue out at the  
crowd, which provokes jeers.

JOHNNY  
I'm here for Audrey's winery.

RICHIE  
That's a conflict of interest.

JOHNNY  
Then fire me.

RICHIE  
Daddy!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Malvino appears from within the crowd and dolefully saunters over.

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
He wants to be fired.

MALVINO  
Can't let go of being a townie, can you?

JOHNNY  
I prefer the term Sonoman.

MALVINO  
Too bad. In couple more years, Johnny, I'll own this town. Might even change the name. Then you'll be a Malvino.

JOHNNY  
You can buy all the land you want. But Lumaville isn't a place, asshole. It's a way of life. Now, excuse me. I have a sommelier contest to win.  
Johnny shoulders passed Malvino and Richie.

RICHIE  
Don't worry, I have a back-up plan.

MALVINO  
Oh? And what's that?

RICHIE  
Let's just say, a little family tradition.

Richie pulls a small VIAL from his pocket. Father and son laugh diabolically.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - AMPITHEATER - CONTINUOUS

Johnny approaches the stage and catches Audrey's eye. She blanches as the Mayor is introducing the sommeliers.

MAYOR  
And over here, competing for Benziger Family Winery is Jake Rabideaux.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAYOR (CONT'D)

Competing for Gunlach-Bundschu is  
Veronica Miller. For Malvino Family  
Winery and Vineyards Incorporated  
now of Lumaville, our three-time  
winner, La Langue.

Boos and hisses come from the crowd. Some wag yells "Viva  
France!"

AUDREY

Thought you had betrayed us to join  
the evil empire.

JOHNNY

I did. And I'm sorry. Turns out I  
didn't have a taste for it.

AUDREY

Or maybe you've got a heart after  
all.

JOHNNY

Or maybe there's a girl who means  
more to me than anything and I want  
to do the best I can for her.

AUDREY

Johnny. Kiss me already.

They kiss. Audrey breaks away and hurriedly slips the sash  
over her head and weaves it onto Johnny.

MAYOR

And representing Dewitt Family  
Winery is, uh, is -

AUDREY

Johnny Lee of Lumaville.

MAYOR

Johnny Lee of Lumaville!

The crowd cheers, "Lumaville!"

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - AMPITHEATER - CONTINUOUS

Anchorwoman Chelsea Kramer purrs into her mic next while  
Daedalus Howell hovers by.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHELSEA

And so it begins. What are they looking for in the varietal competition.

HOWELL

Each som has to declare definitively, what type of grape each wine comes from and the percentage of the blend.

CHELSEA

Sounds tricky.

HOWELL

It is when there's more than, say, to different species of grape in a blend. Each som has a different wine chosen randomly. When it gets passed three at a time it gets complicated.

CHELSEA

(winking)

I'll say.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - AMPITHEATER - CONTINUOUS

Jake Rabideux takes a glass, swirls it. Sniffs. Tastes. Sniffs again. Finally:

JAKE

Cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and merlot?

The mayor looks at an INDEX CARD, shakes his head.

MAYOR

I'm sorry Jake, but that is incorrect.

Veronica Miller takes a glass, swirls it. Sniffs. Tastes. Sniffs again. Tastes again. Sighs. Finally:

VERONICA

Cabernet sauvignon, malbec and merlot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAYOR

That is correct. La Langue?

La Langue simply sniffs his glass.

LA LANGUE

Syrah. Merlot. Cabernet franc.

MAYOR

Absolutment! Correct. John Lee?

Johnny takes a glass, swirls it. Sniffs. Tastes. Sniffs again. Finally:

JOHNNY

Petite syrah, merlot and, um, syrah?

The audience applauds.

MAYOR

(reads card)

Yes. Correct. Round two - Vintage. The sommeliers must declare the year the sample wine was bottled.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - SAME

Chelsea has her arm around Howell who squirms as he straightens his hair for the camera.

CHELSEA

Vintage. Now that's the year a wine is bottled right?

HOWELL

That's right. These sample vintages can span anywhere in the last millennia so these soms better know their stuff.

CHELSEA

I hear older wines are like older women.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWELL

Would that be like vinegar,  
Chelsea?

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - AMPTHEATER - CONTINUOUS

Veronica nervously clutches a wine glass. It shakes in her hand as she tastes the wine. She finally says:

VERONICA

The vintage is... The vintage is...  
Nineteen-ninety-three?

MAYOR

Ooh, so close. The correct vintage  
is actually 1992. A good year for  
wine and good year for me. I got  
divorced that year!

Veronica leaves the stage as La Langue deigns to actually sip this wine. He smiles and rolls his eyes.

LA LANGE

So obvious, 1982.

MAYOR

That is correct! Bien, bien! And  
Johnny Lee?

Johnny takes a glass. Inhales deeply. Exhales slowly and takes a sip. He ponders for what seems an eternity. In the wings, Audrey holds her breath. Cody, is frantically tapping an IPAD. Finally:

JOHNNY

Also 1982.

The mayor looks quizzical, checks his card. After a moment.

MAYOR

Says here, you're right!

Audrey, Cody and Johnny all sigh in relief.

CUT TO:

INT. PREP TENT - SAME

A gazebo where the finest wine is prepped. A WINE STEWARD pours wine into a tray of glasses and steps away. Richie sneaks in and hovers over the glasses with his vial.

The wine steward re-enters and Richie ducks behind stacked CASES of wine unnoticed. The wine steward turns his back and Richie reaches out with the bottle and splashes a drop in one of the glasses.

The wine steward turns his attention to the tray, turns it and wipes a smudge off a glass. He turns away again. Richie reaches to sneak another drop from his vial into the glass -- but alas! -- which one? He hesitates, then chooses one. The steward exits with the tray.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAZA - CONTINUOUS

Chelsea has a glass of WINE.

CHELSEA

And now. The climax.

HOWELL

Yep. The varietal and appellation combo. Not only does the contestant have to name the grape, they have to say where it was grown. It requires knowledge all the world's growing regions. This is where talent and tongues meet their match.

CHELSEA

Now, we like the sound of that, don't we ladies?

CUT TO:

EXT. AMPITHEATER - CONTINUOUS

The wine steward delivers the wine to the last contenders.

MAYOR

Please begin, what is the appellation of this wine?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

La Langue takes a deep whiff and notes something foul. He shakes it off and takes a sip. He gags profusely.

LA LANGUE

This tastes like shit! He puts it under the mayor's nose.

The mayor himself is taken aback.

MAYOR

The rules say, we have to continue. Please name the appellation.

LA LANGUE

I, I, I - I have no idea.

ANGLE ON Malvino who gives Richie a hard look.

MAYOR

Johnny?

Johnny takes a deep whiff and almost immediately vomits. He gathers himself. Tries again. The same reaction. Then something occurs to him.

JOHNNY

Merde-mort.

He looks offstage. He sees Cody and Audrey. They're praying. Behind them, Charlie scuttles up. Johnny is buoyed.

CHARLIE

(whispering)

Taste with your heart, Johnny. With your heart.

JOHNNY

I can't. It's the merde-mort.

CHARLIE

Merde-mort...?

Johnny stokes his resolves and tepidly sticks his tongue into the wine. He is revolted but persists. The crowd is silent.

CHELSEA

Look at that tongue.

MAYOR

Do you have an answer, Johnny?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Johnny spits and gags again. He can barely keep himself together. He bows his head and grips his stomach. He glances up while wiping spittle from his mouth.

Something catches his eye -- it's Audrey, whose lips part in a bittersweet smile. Her shoulders rise a little and resignedly fall. For her, it's over. Johnny's brows knit together, his eyes grow steely.

Johnny sets his jaw. His back straightens. He opens his mouth and closes his eyes and brings the wretched glass of wine, reeking of merde-mort to his lips. His hands are shaking, the liquid in the glass ripples like turd tossed in a pond. He takes a deep breath and suddenly downs the entire glass!

Charlie faints. Cody's iPad tumbles from his hands go to his face in horror. As the wine runs down Johnny's gullet...

FLASHBACK - WINE MEMORIES

TIME LAPSE

- The Plaza -- The winos swigging from the bottle. A wino mouths a four-syllable word...

- Johnny's apartment -- With Audrey, covered in wine, embracing as wine rains down. She is saying something - a four-syllable word...

- The Vine of the Times -- Audrey orders wine from the waitress. Again she utters a four-syllable word.

BACK TO PRESENT

Johnny snaps to -- his eyes widen.

JOHNNY  
(spitting, gagging)  
I know what it is.

Johnny wipes his mouth, looks at the crowd, at Cody and Audrey. He nods at Charlie.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
Petit verdot.

The mayor fumbles with his card and reads:

MAYOR  
Yes. Yes! Petit verdot is correct!

The crowd goes wild. Cody scrambles for his iPad.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

La Langue, in a heap at the foot of the stage, slaps his forehead.

The Mayor taps the microphone, causing the audience to hush.

MAYOR (CONT'D)

And now, son... Johnny, can you name the appellation?

JOHNNY

Where else? Lumaville Valley.

MAYOR

Lumaville Valley is correct! The new winner of the Lumaville Sommelier Championship is Johnny Lee of Dewitt Family Winery!

Malvino and Richie grimace. Audrey seizes Johnny to kiss him but is repulsed by his merde-mort breath. She hesitates but kisses him anyway. Charlie approaches with a glass of wine.

CHARLIE

You did it, Johnny.

JOHNNY

No, we did it, Charlie. All of us.

AUDREY

Well, you sure put Lumaville on the map.

JOHNNY

I'm just glad I found it myself.

CHARLIE

We all are. Except maybe that guy. Charlie raises his glass to Malvino, who nods back from a distance.

Howell approaches Johnny, IPHONE in hand. Cody is on his heels.

CODY

Awesome, man! You really did it!

HOWELL

Yeah, well done, Johnny. Can I get a quote?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

JOHNNY

Uh, sure -- thanks to Audrey and Charlie and Cody and --

HOWELL

How about something more about the symbolism of a local besting a corporate wine baron who planned to pump in wine from out of state and call it Sonoman?

JOHNNY

What?

HOWELL

That's not much of a quote. You're angry, you're confused.

JOHNNY

I'm definitely confused.

HOWELL

And angry. Okay, that'll do.

Howell keys the quote into his iPhone with his thumbs.

HOWELL (CONT'D)

(to Cody)

Now what do I do?

Cody takes the iPhone and taps its screen.

CODY

Watch this...

SERIES OF SHOTS

-- A symphony of SOUNDS erupt from the mobile devices of everyone in the Plaza - chimes, rings, buzzes fill the air as people rise from the seats pulling phones from pockets and purses and expressing incredulity -- "What the...?"

-- The Human Wine Bottle's eyes are bugging out at the PHONE in his hand. His brow furrowed, he searches the crowd until he spies --

-- Malvino and Richie also checking their phones -- they panic!

-- The Human Wine Bottle charges Malvino and Richie and tackles them!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

HUMAN WINE BOTTLE

I got them! I got them! The guys  
pumping Arizona wine into  
Lumaville!

A mob of townsfolk including everyone from the Mayor, Gil the Scarecrow and the Waitress to the old Hobos encircle Malvino and Richie. It looks like things might get ugly until a pair of POLICEMEN make their way into the throng, cuff the two and cart them off.

ANGLE ON Richie.

RICHIE

We should have gone to Napa.

CUT TO:

EXT. AMPITHEATER - DAY

JOHNNY

I need a drink.

CHARLIE

I got just the thing.

He breaks his Emergency Bottle. In it is a LUGGAGE KEY with which he unlocks his suitcase. He rummages a moment and emerges with an old BOTTLE.

JOHNNY

Is that...?

CHARLIE

Yep. My wine from the Paris  
tasting. Last one -- was in the  
luggage they lost for a spell. You  
wanna glass?

JOHNNY

Yeah, but...

CHARLIE

Don't worry, it's one-hundred  
percent merde-mort-free.

(beat)

One of you townies have a  
corkscrew?

AUDREY

I do, Charlie.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Audrey tosses Charlie a CHURCH KEY. He pops open the bottle pours three glasses. Charlie, Audrey and Johnny each take one.

CHARLIE

To wine. It improves with age—the older I get, the more I like it.

They connect glasses.

SUPER:

-- With Audrey's help Johnny eventually became an award-winning winemaker. Together they launched their own brand "Audacious Red," which enjoys huge sales in Arizona.

-- Charlie Laube was re-discovered by the French viticultural establishment and was awarded the Chevalier du Mérite Agricole for distinguished service to the Wine industry.

-- Cody sold his blog business to Google for a bajillion dollars. He uses his money to help save financially troubled newspapers.

-- Daedalus Howell's Malvino pipeline story led the Malvino's arrest for fraud and much critical admiration for Howell who later went on to write a Pulitzer Prize-winning Tweet.

-- La Langue performs in FRENCH KISS, a Kiss tribute band at Paris Las Vegas.

-- Gil eventually met the Wizard and got a brain.

FADE TO:

EXT. DESERT - DAY

A MANHOLE cover on the desert floor is jostled free. Rodriguez and Guiteriz emerge from the hole and stand stupefied on in desert sun.

PULL OUT to reveal a PATROL CAR on which is inscribed, "US Customs and Border Protection" and a sign that reads SIGN reads "Welcome to Arizona."

RODRIGUEZ & GUITERIZ

Merde.

FADE OUT.