

THE GREAT WINE HEIST

STORY & ILLUSTRATION BY *Matt Silady*

THE FRENCH LAUNDRY
YOUNTVILLE, CALIFORNIA

I'M A LITTLE
NERVOUS.

NERVOUS?

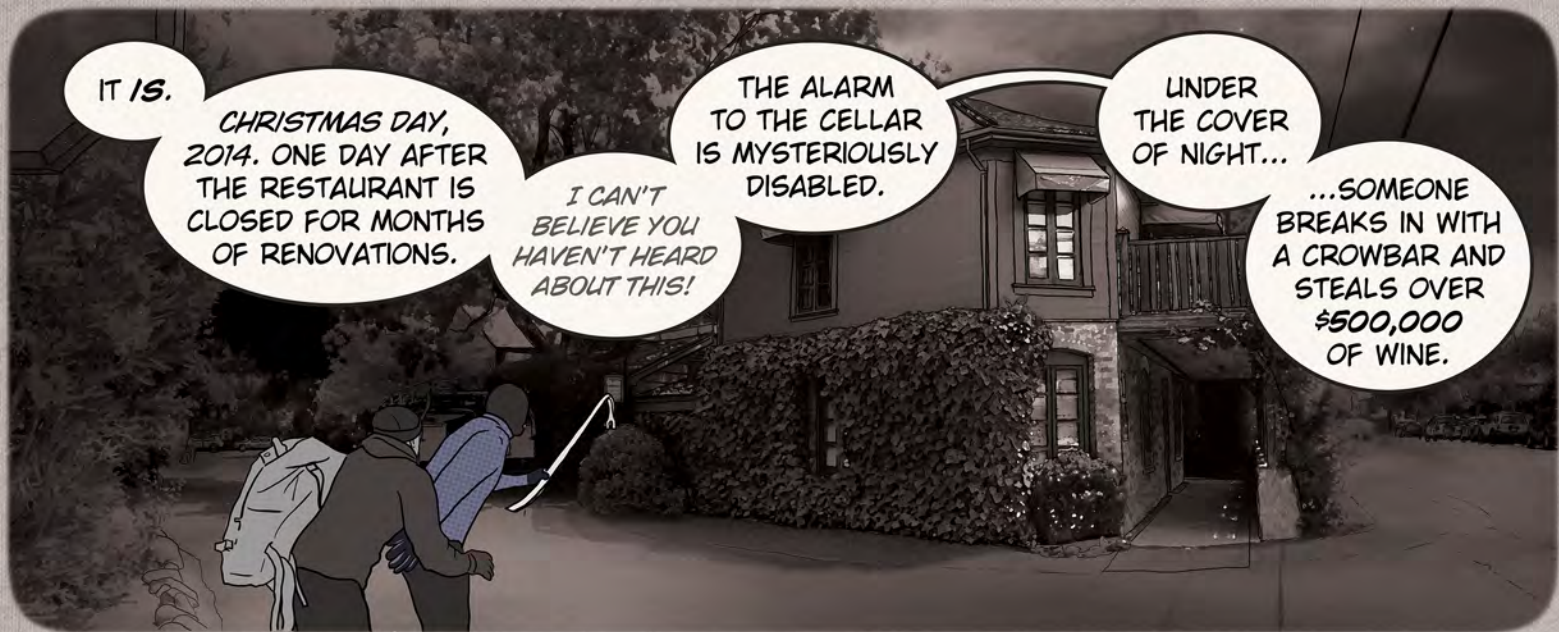
I'VE JUST
NEVER HAD A
MEAL LIKE THIS
BEFORE.

WHAT
ABOUT THAT
ONE PLACE?

NO, THIS
IS NICER. *WAY*
NICER.

WELL,
IN THAT
CASE...





IT IS.

CHRISTMAS DAY, 2014. ONE DAY AFTER THE RESTAURANT IS CLOSED FOR MONTHS OF RENOVATIONS.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU HAVEN'T HEARD ABOUT THIS!

THE ALARM TO THE CELLAR IS MYSTERIOUSLY DISABLED.

UNDER THE COVER OF NIGHT...

...SOMEONE BREAKS IN WITH A CROWBAR AND STEALS OVER \$500,000 OF WINE.



A CROW-BAR? HOW BARBARIC.

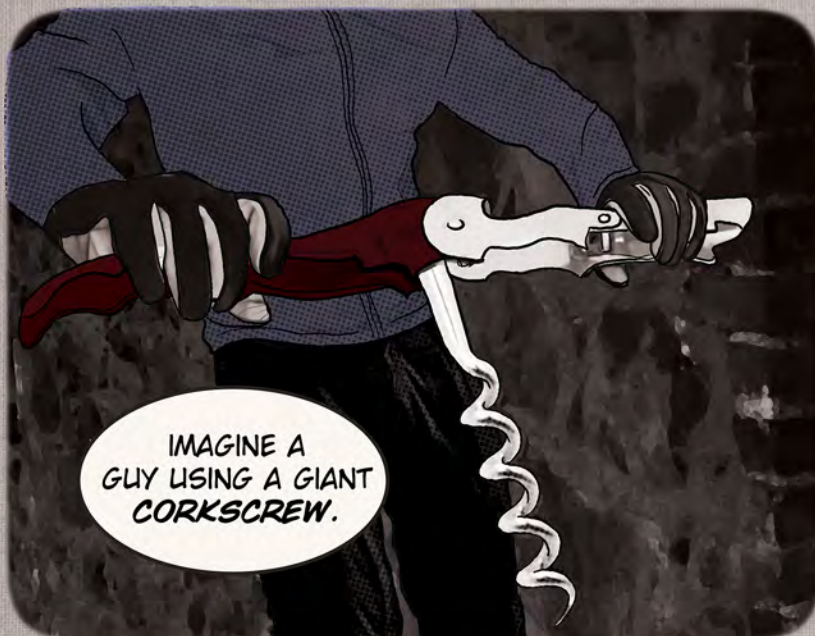


SEEMS LIKE THEY SHOULD HAVE USED A CORKSCREW.

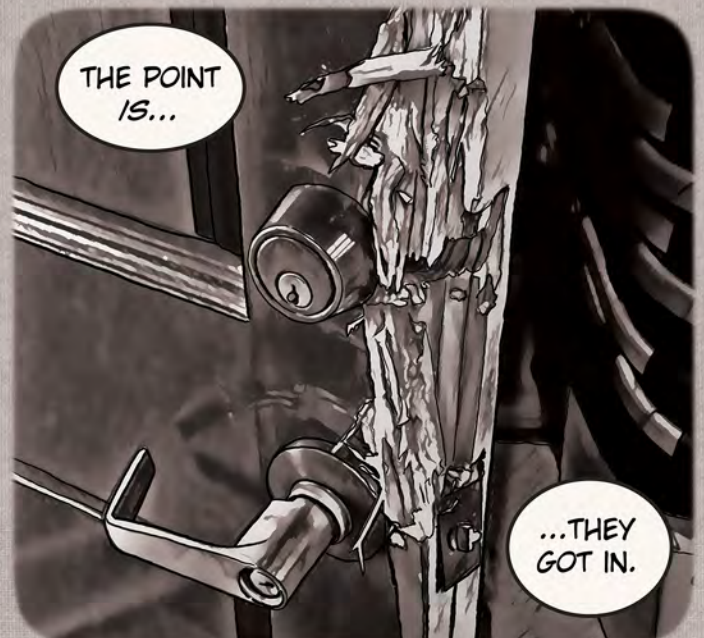


GOOD GRIEF.

FINE.



IMAGINE A GUY USING A GIANT CORKSCREW.



THE POINT IS...

...THEY GOT IN.



WAIT,
DID YOU SAY
\$500,000?

THAT'S
RIGHT.

SO, THEY
CLEARED THE
PLACE OUT?

HARDLY!

INITIAL
REPORTS LISTED
ONLY 76 MISSING
BOTTLES.

THAT'S
LIKE SIX CASES
OF WINE.



THEY KNEW
WHAT THEY
WERE DOING.

IT'S LIKE THEY
HAD A MAP OF THE
CELLAR LEADING THEM
STRAIGHT TO THE
GOOD STUFF.

A HALF
MILLION DOLLARS
DISAPPEARING INTO
THE NIGHT.



UMMM...
HOW MUCH IS
THIS BOTTLE
AGAIN?







IT'S GOT TO BE MORE LIKE AN ART HEIST, RIGHT?

YOU MUST HAVE SOMEONE LINED UP TO BUY THE GOODS.



OTHERWISE, YOU'RE SITTING AROUND DRINKING \$15,000 BOTTLES OF WINE.

DO YOU THINK THEY DRANK ANY OR JUST TRIED TO SELL IT ALL?



I'M STILL JUST TRYING TO IMAGINE THE GUYS WHO DID IT.

WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT DISGRUNTLED EX-EMPLOYEES HERE, ARE WE?

OR ANY OF WINE COUNTRY'S USUAL SUSPECTS?

NO.

JUST A COUPLE CRIMINALS FROM THE SOUTH BAY AND A DREAM.

SO THEY CAUGHT THEM BOTH?

THEY DID!

BUT NOT
BEFORE BRINGING
IN A...

FORENSIC SOMMELIER

NOW YOU'RE
JUST MAKING
THINGS UP!

HER NAME IS
MAUREEN DOWNEY,
AND SHE'S MY
NEW HERO.

SHE CONSULTS
FOR AUCTION HOUSES
AND SLEUTHS OUT
COUNTERFEIT WINES.

I'M IN
THE WRONG
BUSINESS.

NO
KIDDING.

I WANT
THAT JOB.
TRACKING CRIMINALS
AND DRINKING WINE
ALL DAY.

FOR YOUR NEXT COURSE, SAUTÉED FILLET OF MEDITERRANEAN TURBOT, APPLEWOOD SMOKED BACON, RAINIER CHERRY, GLAZED CIPOLLINI ONIONS, AND WHOLE GRAIN MUSTARD

OH, THANK YOU!

THIS ISN'T THE
FIRST TIME THE FBI
HAS CALLED ON HER
EXPERTISE.

SHE CONSULTED ON THE
HIGH-PROFILE RUDY
KURNIAWAN CASE AND
PLAYED A BIG ROLE IN
BRINGING HIS COUNTERFEIT
WINE OPERATION TO
JUSTICE.



THERE'S A DOCUMENTARY
ABOUT IT CALLED
"SOUR GRAPES."

(I MAY HAVE WATCHED IT
ON MY IPAD LAST NIGHT.)

BUT SHE WAS PRETTY
CERTAIN THE FRENCH
LAUNDRY AND OTHER
NEARBY BREAK-INS
WERE CONNECTED.



WELL..

...AND THE FACT THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANYONE IN THE INDUSTRY **NOT** TO KNOW ABOUT THE HEIST. IT HAD BEEN NATIONAL NEWS.

THE FEDS KNEW THE WINE WAS TRANSPORTED ACROSS STATE LINES AFTER AN ANONYMOUS BUYER IN NORTH CAROLINA TURNED OVER ALL BUT A FEW OF THE MISSING BOTTLES THROUGH A LAWYER.

BY THE TIME THE CONTRABAND SHOWED UP ACROSS THE COUNTRY, THE JIG WAS UP. EVEN BUYERS WITH THE WINE ALREADY IN HAND WANTED NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.

BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, INDICTMENTS FOR CONSPIRACY TO TRANSPORT STOLEN GOODS WERE ISSUED AND THESE GUYS WERE BOOKED.

