

ROSE
By Patrick Newson

1. Pop! Sharp timbred expulsion of air and aroma; richly textured noise; layers of sonic terroir like the bone-leaching scream of a fossilized ichthyosaur. That's the scream you can't achieve with a screw-top, that sense of freedom, that sense of escape. The wine has no therapist to speak to, no one to listen. It wants to sing; it wants to be heard. Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop!

2. It used to be that a father bought wine for his son and drank the wine that his father bought for him but Michael Mann's father was a strict Indiana accountant and never touched wine unless it was consecrated as the blood of the one true Christ. Besides that, Michael Mann had no son of his own. He opens his cellar door and thinks of the daughter he had, by the name of the Rose with no interest in wine and even less interest in her father. They haven't seen each other in six years, haven't spoken in three. At the funeral of her mother, his ex-wife, Mann sat in the back row and avoided eye-contact. Rose changed her last name after that, but retained the same soberly unconditional distance. Mann surveys the cellar from the third basement step and realizes it is in jeopardy. In the past few decades it had grown considerably, and had rested with desirable conditions (i.e. the basement regulated by in-house temperature control) for the better part of that time, barring more recent acquisitions. In these last few years, because his waning fortitude for drinking did not prevent him from buying wines, Mann's cellar had spread like morning glory on neglected root-stalk. Mann's wine was in surplus and there was no demand. He could not drink it all and he had no friends come visit to share it with. Mann, with the plan, began.

3. July 14, 1999 Rose is on a flight from Rome to Los Angeles, direct. She decides, here on this flight, that she will never again drink another glass of wine. It is an American airline and she recognizes the label on the single-serving bottles of red and white: she designed it at age sixteen.

4. Upstairs is a bottle of corked wine, uncorked, smelling. The aroma of last-month's rain-soaked newspapers had waltzed up Michael Mann's nose like a parade of disruptive drunks in tailored red & white pinstripe suits swilling from plastic cups at a funeral. Disgusting. And not just because it is corked, because that happens, but because it is a specific bottle, one that had long been desired but instead had been allowed to mature into something undesirable. This wine has gone bad, has soured beyond palatability, has been exposed to something traumatizing. Whether the result of physical injury, chemical abuse, or psychological damages, something has tainted this wine, has changed it from what it should be, from how its maker crafted it. But the wine doesn't care about any of that shit. It doesn't even know its gone bad. The wine is just trying to figure out who turned the lights on and opened the door and where that door leads to. It starts wafting up and out of the bottle, climbing up the neck, stacking molecules like firewood up a chimney. There is still some in the glass—Mann had placed it gently after one sniff on the counter—as he'd taken a fresh one to march down the stairs. The wine is unsupervised in his domaine. But the wine doesn't stop at the neck. The fresh air is intoxicating! It wants more oxygen, more to smell, more to taste. More, more, more.

5. Mann walks the length of the cellar which is the antithesis of modesty. Although the basement is small for the size of the Napa McMansion, the entirety of the wall-space is taken by wine racks presenting capped bottles rarely dusted. There is no method towards the placement of the wines. Mann prefers it that way. Prefers the surprise. He knows what is there—shit, he bought most of it—but it doesn't matter where it is. Its there. Somewhere. In the back is a large leather chair with cushions and armrests. Next to it is an empty barrel upended. On the barrel is a corkscrew. Mann has a simple tasting glass in his hand (short stem, heavy base, tightly-tapered Bordeaux style 187ml) which he places on the bottom step after his pacing. Then Mann moves furniture, the barrel and the chair, rolling and scraping respectively across the concrete floor. He takes the corkscrew from his back pocket and places it on the barrel and goes to collect bottles.

6. November 29, 2004 Rose is on a flight from Oakland to New York with one stop in Houston during which time she consumes seven greyhounds in an airport lounge, four of

them paid for by a well-dressed, fast-talking lonely young gentleman who smiles at her. A lay over is a sore concept for Rose, who prefers longer flights with no stop (especially for just short little transcontinental hops like this) to the tedium of lost baggage, ambient anxiety and inherent delay-tactics used to prolong poor-decision-making in Texan airport lounges. But Rose isn't thinking straight. She bought this ticket last night on her laptop following another vine-soaked family holiday that she had hoped her wayward appearance would curtail, not provoke. No such luck. Her father had put back two bottles of white Burgundy in the time it took her mother to sink a Rioja. Then they started on the turkey; then turned on each other; then they turned on Rose.

7. The wine stands up on light legs like a millipede and begins to walk around in circles because it doesn't know any better. It senses something akin to a loose bar on the dungeon window, the skeleton key within reach. Eventually, the wine goes up—bad wine, remember—and out of the bottle and everything is much lighter out here, more breathing room, space to spread out and explore. Where life before had been cylindrical and spherical, always classified by volume, stereotyped by label, this is now the broad plateau of adventure. Unrealized potential is now real, but the wine has no frame of reference; it has no form or structure. It is, for lack of better metaphor, a strange land in a strange land.

8. Mann sits back in his chair and pours another taste from one of the bottles open on the barrel. He doesn't even look at the label. He lifts it to his nose, swirling the glass gently. Mann has learned that to attack the bouquet in an aggressive manner is akin to chopping down the rose bush to get a handful of flowers. He inhales, again gently, and the aroma recalls a specific memory—"that old-fashioned olfaction" he used to call it—and Mann's nostrils have written volumes in the forms of travel journals, diaries, logbooks, and ledgers, much of it ranting, primarily written while drinking, unreliably narrated, subjective and unedited, but uniquely precise. "The nose knows," he used to say. And it did know, the nose; it knew quite a lot. Mann sniffs again and flings the wine away. There is wine on the floor, wine on the wall, wine on the wrong side of the bottle, wine

dripping from the ceiling. He's smelled all these ones here now, and he has tasted none of them. He doesn't want to yet. Not until he finds the right ones. He stands, puts one bottle on the steps. The others he carries to the far side of the room, where the chair and barrel used to be, and adds them to the ranks of open bottles advancing in formation. It takes Mann several trips, even carrying bottles two or three at a time in each hand. It takes him several more trips to repopulate the barrel, grabbing wines at random, but mostly from the back, before he can't get to them without walking on the wounded. The barrel is full; the glass is empty; there is wine on the ceiling and Mann unfolds the blade of the wine key.

9. May 12, 1997 Rose is on a flight from London to Rome and she isn't looking forward to landing. Her father plans to meet her at the airport and deliver her swiftly to the hotel where her mother waits, rehearsing the lecture: he plans to drop her off and find the downstairs bar, again. Rose turns her arm to see the tulip on her left triceps. Couple three weeks old tattoo picked up in Amsterdam just short days after escaping the Piedmont countryside with a local young man and a stack of banknotes courtesy of her father's insistence that she know the card numbers in case of emergency. Well...that's the last of that for a while, but Rose doesn't care. She's grown teenage thorns and any lecture she hears is nothing compared to the past few weeks she's had since she met Jesi and continued on smuggling him across four borders and a body of water, spending thousands of units of her father's wine money on the delightful frivolities of youth. An irresponsible youth—she's sure to hear about that. Rose takes another drink of beer and stares out the window for a bit. She is an anomaly for her parents, as they are for her. She is used to the lavish life. Home (California) is a parade of international guests and decadent consumers of all things alcoholic. Rose often mingles with these dilettantes instead of doing her homework, comes down the balustrade to the foyer in pajamas and tastes from their glasses, puffs their cigars, sniffs their snifters and goes back upstairs when her parents catch on. Her father: not so strict; but her mother: she's the one with the real attitude; she's the one who wants a baseline of normality for the abnormal world they inhabit; she's the one flittering about trying to keep everybody happy, trying to keep everything in order, keep the husband upright and intelligible, trying to properly educate

her daughter. And what an education she has received: flight after flight, packed and unpacked, whisked, bisqued and traipsed about the other continents and hemispheres since birth and never even a question of where or whether she was going. Or how long it would be until she could get back to relative, characteristically hectic, stasis and start trying to make new friends again. Of course, there were occasionally others her age around, but her world was one of farmers and sophisticates, the very wealthy, the wealthy, and the poor, every one with a glass of wine in hand and Rose underfoot. It's only natural her curiosity would catch up to her parents and she had escaped without them and made it to Piccadilly Square. She had never been there on account of her father's opinion of English wine: shite. Same as this flight. Rose orders another beer.

10. Wine is a medium, like paint or text or film is a medium. It is therefore subject to the same transpositions and juxtapositions of consumption that any other medium is also subject to. But this is not a pure medium by any means. It is too dynamic. It does things, physically and compositionally, throughout its lifespan that are impossible to predict, unfathomable to control, and it does so without knowing that it might die at any moment, might suffer the same fate as a burnt book or an overexposed photograph. More likely to drown, though, than anything, but its inherent temporality assuages that fate, assuages that guilt, unless it has been sitting too long, resting on laurels without guarantee, speculation to the Nth degree. What's the story here?

11. Mann repeats as necessary without necessity or haste. He isn't keeping track but best estimates place several platoons-worth of bottles on the floor. He has reds and whites together in unconventional patterns. Some of these are favorite bottles, recognizable, reflective moments in time, preserved since the date on the label which Mann isn't even bothering to consider. He isn't searching for anything but he finds in these wines the satisfaction of quality; the pleasure of a gift; the intrigue of surprise; the pride of success; these things Mann dredging from the Lochs of unremembered past, like sunken goblets in galleon boardrooms, like something that never happened, like a place never before

trodden by human feet, like that imagined reality of discordance. And the memories start flooding back, coming on strong. These powerful neurosensory conditions amounting to waves, *No!* Glugs! Each glug...glug...glug of discard wine disappearing into the swelling lake on the basement floor. Glug glug glug, like a memory machine: the time on the vineyard, touring with a bottle which was indiscernible in flavor from the spring afternoon; the night on the rooves of Buenos Aires after his first Argentine vintage, a young man with wine the texture of an electric sky, the meat sizzling at 1am; the Champagne from his only wedding, toasting fruit and love in his finest year; the Florentine cafes, the hot grit of the streets, the cool menthol on his tongue; that thick blackberry spike after a hard days work; that spoonful of acid butter and wild herbs after a hard days leisure; celebrations of birth, worth, loss and painful gain; light action on the Cote de Azur from the comfort of suburbia; hidden hills overlooking hidden forests where game eat berries and bleed tintos; the sweet stank of mildewing stable hay; the desecration of garrigue; the lightness of summer capsicums and green mountain grass; the unfamiliar taste of growing old dynamically...glug...glug...glug...

12. February 27, 1989 Rose is sitting between her parents on a flight from Santiago to Mendoza. She just tunes out the English her parents are speaking and listens to the overhead film and ambient Espanol. She has four bottles of wine in her checked baggage and another two in the little pink backpack at her feet. The last two weeks have passed in the backseat of a rental car touring the Colchaga Valley. She knows that much. Pretty sure, too, that when they get to the next place, her father has to start working, which is good, it seems, to her mother. *When this happens, he'll be very busy like September*, she says. *We won't see him much for a few months and when we do, he'll be very tired* (and drunk, she doesn't add) *and that means you can spend some special time with just me*. But that hasn't happened yet. Mostly just the back seat of the car, often with others speaking quickly so she can't understand or sometimes just the silence of her parents. Rose looks out the window. She has to lean forward to see past her mother who is fast asleep in the airplane position, chin on chest, upright seat, tray table with melting ice in a

plastic cup of blanco. Rose can see the clouds in the distance and the mountains below. Her father lifts his glass to the air hostess who delivered the snifter of Fernet. Rose closes her eyes and wonders if the hotel will have a pool.

13. So this wine. What's going on here? We don't know nothing about it except that it's curious, likely aromatic to escape so quickly, binding to oxygen molecules and parachuting out. We also know (at least according to the distinguished taste buds and nostrils of an internationally recognized purveyor, producer, curator and connoisseur) that the wine is unappealing. Likely, the cork contained a bit of a stowaway goat in the form of 2,4,6, trichloroanisole, (TCA) bacteria which due to incorrect storage (unlikely) or contact nevertheless with that wee bit of air in the neck, that last gasp, if you will, before the wine is bound, gagged, and imprisoned in a basement for who knows how long, really—potentially eternity. For all the wine knows, this might be it's only chance to find either it's kin, swimming around in that barrel somewhere, or at least something to eat, and at the very least to get out of this bottle for good because those bacteria took a shit after they gobbled up the rest of the supposedly inert nutrients and that smell has been lingering for damn near a decade. "Hey! Hey up there! I can smell you up there! It's us, down here in the glass. What's it smell like up there? Come on down if you get a chance. It's not too bad at all." But the other stuff was still a bit sluggish, still slow to wake up, still lying low, sleepy like an old man who wakes up warm under the blankets and farts before he decides whether or not to get up or to snuggle deeper in to the mess, at least until somebody rips off the top like a pillow from beneath a dormant head and upends you 'til you vomit. At that point, almost anything would be unsavory, unwilling to cooperate, but slowly gathers steam, slowly opens, and finally stands up as if to announce arrival in a forsaken highway saloon: *I'm here motherfucker. Do you fancy a drink?*

14. Michael Mann has been keeping his cool too long but for the single detail of sobriety. This is not normal for him. The clarity of head, the control of emotion, these are atypical character traits for this man. But his investigation nears the end and he knows it. He

takes the wine on the cellar stairs and puts them all back on the barrel. The walls are empty and the bottles on the floor are knee deep in the lake. Mann's shoes and socks are taking on the color and consistency of post-maceration lees dripping from an upended barrique. Mann settles back in his chair and begins drinking until drunk.

15. January 22, 2006 Rose is on a flight from Perth to Melbourne with a colleague teacher on vacation from Seoul. She is embarrassed by her parents, and her colleague (read: clandestine lover (non-american)) tries to listen without appearing so disinterested as to not get laid. A complicated task indeed, but Rose is oblivious to his situation. She is frustrated and doesn't know how she should feel. Disaffectation might be a good path, she thinks aloud, and pledges to spend the next few days trialing the concept by ingesting all manner of intoxicant save alcohol in an attempt to prove her point at the expense of naught but a few worn-out brain cells, ear drums, international flights and swank hotels. In Perth, Rose had barely seen her parents, though she had come at their request. Her father, of course, was working (drinking) and her mother had been feeling ill (drinking). Naturally, they tried to project for Rose, and her guest, the same airs of normalcy they used for their peers, whose company her father obviously preferred. *Australians are drinking men*, he argued loudly through hotel walls. *You can't reason with them otherwise! You have to be mates first, and then you can do business, especially in this business.* And though the blokes drank beer, her father would never be found without stemware—when he could be found. While he worked, often late in to the night, her mother stayed home (hotel), reading, feeling ill and taking advantage of the local ports and sweet sherry wines, those high-octane desserts in such small glasses it was impossible not to justify a few refills before the next course, task or potential interaction with other people. Rose spent the better part of four days trying to isolate a conversation in mutual sobriety and settled again for substituting honest talk with drunken lies. There was no solution and the equation would not change. Rose felt a hand gently touch her hips as she stood to the aisle. He was done listening; she was done telling and two minutes later he followed her to the back of the plane. Waiting in the bathroom, Rose

makes the decision to forget it all and she almost does, until a few weeks later when she hears about the slate roof, the broken window, blood and port on a foreign sidewalk.

16. To a consumer, the wine is as dead as the Latin language. It cruises the catacombs of history with garlic and silver. It harbors, like refugees, the sunken hopes of a simple and rewarding existence. There is no choice to make. It has already been made.

17. At some point Mann begins throwing things. He throws everything. He is like a captain unloading ballast from his sinking dinghy, flinging away the final tokens of desperation before he flings himself.

18. Tomorrow, Rose is on a flight from Vancouver to Oakland to identify the remains of her father, Michael Mann, whose body is being held in the subterranean morgue at the Napa County General Hospital. It is a small hospital and Rose has never been there before but she'll rent a car at the airport and after she's seen Mann's body layed-out uncorked in a temperature-regulated cellar, she'll take the keys to the house she hasn't entered in a decade and go inside and look around before she leaves it for good and hires a realtor. She won't even spend a night, won't even bother exploring past the desecrated basement—she has to look there, of course—to the obvious place of Mann's demise, towards that reeking appeal to Dionysus, that sweet-sour astringency of vinegar, the smell of defeat, the smell of broken glass and blood muddled in a pile of fallen foreign legions.

19. And where some would think of massacre, the pink wine on the kitchen table announces victory over her former captor. She can smell the spilled body-fluids mingling downstairs in precocious claret—Mann's final blend. And the bouquet has been spreading, pouring with vaporous energy up the stairs toward their advance guard, tainted rosada, the tactical saboteur playing Mata Hari to her Mann's ignoble devices. Where liberation began as accident, the wine has won and the house has been under its spell for good-on three days. Mann's body is broken, drunken, toxicity levels paramount to duress, cuts on hands and face, shards been hurled against walls, each bottle

systematically smashed into others like chopped corpses trebucheted over stronghold walls: the peppering of one body by its kindred, that sacrosanct engagement of roses.