

## Blood and Wine

It was a crisp evening in April, the wind began to kick up, the unseasonably cool air snapping as it smacked a nearby flag. Our van was safely parked in the “Art Personnel Only” spot; the dumpster a few rods away making its presence known. Stephen got there first, his need for nicotine causing him to rush out of the non smoking conservatory very quickly, his guitar still attached, now ecstatic he paid the extra bucks for the four hundred foot cord. As he reached for his lighter, he heard Tim from inside say “we’re The Menus, goodnight”, caught his breath, and began to puff away. The rest of us waited for the show to be over, and began to converge towards the vehicle.

We had done this particular show for a number of years in a row. We called it the “wine gig.” It was usually early in the evening, ending around ten, with the crowd quiet at first, but eventually coming around nicely. With our usual spirits of choice found in the clubs not available, we were always elated when numerous carafes of wine were sent to the stage during the sets. In the past, the hosts were gracious enough to set us up with a few bottles for the way home. This time being no exception.

Jimi was next to exit the large, gray enamel door we entered only a few hours earlier and immediately began screaming at the smoking stranger leaning against our Caravan.

“Jimi....it’s me” Steve barked as he shook his head, curls of white smoke rising from his fingers.

Jimi quickly realized his mistake, his cheeks now matching the crimson hue of the vessels in his dull, empty eyes.

“Yeah, right” Jimi muttered in a just kidding type tone, “I knew that”, hoping Steve didn’t see his second, longer, squinting glance. Upstairs, Spike was collecting his bag, now slightly heavier than before. And clanking. “You gotta corkscrew, Stetter?” he inquired. John, across the room, did not answer the question. He appeared to be introducing his glass of Riesling in his right hand to the Chardonnay in his left. “I hope you guys get along down there” he prayed, and shot them down, rather quickly.

“You gotta corkscrew, Stetter?” Spike repeated, more impatiently this time.

“I heard you the first time, Ryan” John retorted, the priority of his earlier activity becoming frighteningly apparent. “Of course I gotta damn corkscrew” he continued. “I’ve got it all.”

Moments later we were all miraculously in the van, as Tim got there a few goodbyes quicker than usual. We pulled out slowly, Jimi behind the wheel, his hair oily and tussled.

We were cruising along nicely and after a few loud bounces on the shoulder it was Tim who brought it up. “Who’s got that wine?” he asked, burping Merlot, his purple teeth hard to see in the dark.

Before anyone could answer facetiously, John blurted it was Spike, and the drummer reached into his bulging bag. The glistening, corked cylinder was now visible and shining in his hand. John began to smile. “Time to party”, he said. Who’s got that corkscrew?”

As Spike screamed and reached for his pistol, Tim tried to calm him, quoting a nice verse from the Bible. Moments later, after all the veins were successfully restored to their appropriate temples and irony was explained to Jimi, the rest of the band chuckled and tried to find a solution to our inability to pop the bubbly. It was here that the lanky bass player tried to redeem himself. Pulling a three foot tool box out of a two foot backpack as only he could do, John went to work. For the next ten minutes or so, the interior of the van was filled with the sounds of cordless drills, nail drivers, various hammering, cursing and screw guns.

“Anyone got a quarter inch, Dewalt adaptable, self correcting masonry bit?” John questioned, a smoldering blowtorch glowing in his left hand. The bustle continued for a few more minutes and once the dust and smoke had cleared, we all glanced towards the sweaty John and our jaws hit the floor. There in his grasp was the original wine bottle, now with so many screws and nails protruding from the cork it resembled a small space station. John then confidently reached for his needle nose pliers, stuck Mir 2 between his legs, and began to yank on the screws.

“Watch out, Johnny,” Steve warned from the front seat, “that’ll slip and poke out your eye.”

“Don’t worry, guitar boy. I’m fine.” As if cued by a director, seconds later the shiny pliers slipped off the top screw and soared towards John’s face. We all heard a dark, squishing sound and a burst of profanity as John winced with pain.

“Is it open...I mean are you okay?” Spike asked, thirsty. With one last pull and blood on his cheek, John gave one last tug. We all saw (except for John) that bottle was indeed open. We passed it around enjoying the fruits of our labor, spitting out pieces of cork as we rode.