

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/3

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The Problem with Filou

THE FOUR MEMBERS OF THE ARTISTS RETREAT got together to figure out who had stolen the bottles of wine from the rack near the front door. All of them said they didn't do it, but secretly nobody believed each other. They sat around the dining room table talking, while the mountains and trees outside in the French landscape listened as their witnesses.

"I don't drink wine," Marie said. She was an artist from Scotland and was studying to be an Alexander technique trainer. The three other people in the group only had a vague idea of what that entailed. She explained in a long-winded process that it was learning the best way to hold your body. She wasn't eating anything rich or drinking any alcohol, so the others didn't think she could be the one.

"I didn't like the wine that was on the rack," Jim said. "I've been drinking rose." He was American, and the only man in the group. The others thought he was eccentric because he said he was studying to be a group leader in Tantric workshops. Nicole and Bridget didn't know exactly what that was, but Marie explained to them that it was just about sex. Marie was reading a book entitled TANTRA FOR WOMEN, so she was able to discuss it with Jim. Nicole and Bridget didn't know what to talk about with Jim, because they both didn't understand him. He was writing a short story about his former lover, a Russian woman who died from ovarian cancer. He was planning on travelling to a part of the pilgrimage of El Camino de Santiago in Spain because she told him she wished she could have gone.

Bridget was the other American. She didn't have any weird things she was studying, but she was a Reiki practitioner, and a former psychiatric patient. She told the group that it had been twenty years since she had been in the psychiatric hospital, and that she had bipolar disorder. She wrote poetry and was working on a novel. "I couldn't drink all that wine," Bridget said. "And I'm not a thief."

Jim wasn't sure about that. He had seen her take beer up to her room late at night to drink it alone. He didn't say anything because she was the only other American in the group and they shared that bond.

"I don't know why you would think I would do it," Nicole said. She was the Australian. Nicole had an excruciating flying phobia, but had flown all the way from Australia to France to celebrate her fiftieth birthday, which had been April Fools Day. She wrote nonfiction and poetry, and she was working on an essay about Alzheimer's disease. She wasn't studying anything strange, but she had tried everything to get over her fear of flying. She said the best thing to do for that was Meridian Tapping, when a person taps her hands on points of her body in order to relieve stress. "I can't drink four bottles of wine," Nicole said. "And I'm an honest person. It couldn't have been one of us. Someone else from the village must have done it."

"But why would anyone break in here and steal our wine?" Marie said. "This is France. Don't you think the neighbors respect wine too much to steal it?"

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The group heard a clanking outside. A dog, Filou poked through the door. Filou was known as the mayor of the village of La Bastide. He trotted over to the wine rack and took a bottle of wine in his mouth.

"Filou, you bad dog," Nicole said. She was a dog lover, and missed her dogs at home. Filou walked through the door with the bottle of red wine. "Come back, you rascal."

"How could he do that?" Jim said. "That dog has to be a genius!"

They all chased the dog up the stairs and into the village.

"How do you say stop in French again?" Nicole asked. "Oh yeah, Arrêtez!" She chased after the dog.

"He's a French dog," Bridget said, laughing. "The dogs must love their wine, too."

"No, I think he's just well trained," Marie said.

"But he doesn't seem well trained," Bridget said. "He seems stupid."

"He's a trickster," Nicole said. "Like his name. That's what Filou means."

The dog disappeared between the ancient stone walls of the idyllic French village.

"We have to make sure the gate is closed," Nicole said. "We can't have a dog stealing our wine. What would we do if it all disappeared?"

"We would have to buy more," Bridget said.

"It's not easy to get down the mountain," Jim said. "Maybe Marie could drive us."

"We would have to manage it," Bridget said. "Or we would have to find Filou and steal the wine back."

"That might not be easy," Nicole said. "The French love their wine."

"But he's a demon of a dog. There must be something we can do," Bridget said.

"We might have to be content with looking at the fire and enjoying each other's company," Marie said.

The group headed back down the stairs and into the house.

"But this is France," Bridget said. "What's France without wine?"

While the group sat around the dining room table trying to figure out the best way to get the wine back, the sun went down, and the mountains sighed for the thousands of years that have passed and would never breathe life again.