

Cambridge English Readers

.....
Level 5

Series editor: Philip Prowse

Windows of the Mind

Frank Brennan



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Cambridge University Press 2001

First published 2001

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in 12/15pt Adobe Garamond [CE]

ISBN 0 521 75014 8 paperback

ISBN 0 521 75015 6 cassette

No character in this work is based on any person living or dead.
Any resemblance to an actual person or situation is purely accidental.

Contents

A Fine Wine	4
A Nose for a Story	22
Arlo's War	42
Open Doors	60
A Gentle Touch	79

A Fine Wine

‘Extraordinary! Quite, quite extraordinary!’

Daniel Appleby did not often use such words to describe the wines he tasted. The other man in the room was waiting to see if he liked this one or not. His future depended on what Daniel Appleby said – if he liked the wine it would be bought by one of the biggest supermarkets around. It would be sold everywhere. The man who owned the vineyard looked on nervously. His vineyard was small, but it was one of the oldest in the Bordeaux region of France. If he sold his wine, the business that had been in his family for over two hundred years would be saved.

Daniel Appleby held the glass to his nose and smelled the wine again. He lifted the glass up to the light from the window to see its colour better. He was the Chief Wine Taster for Happimart Supermarkets. If he liked a wine, then everybody bought it. If he didn’t like a wine, nobody did. His word was like the judgement of God.

‘You say you have been making this wine for the last two hundred years?’ he asked the other man, Monsieur Colbert, a proud-looking man of over seventy years of age, whose hair was still as black as it had been when he was twenty.

‘I am old but I am not *that* old, sir,’ Monsieur Colbert said with a little smile. ‘But my family has been making this wine since the time of Napoleon Bonaparte. If I may

say so, this is the only vineyard in all of France to produce wine in this way. It is my secret.'

Monsieur Colbert was hoping that his little joke might relax things a little.

Daniel Appleby took his profession very seriously. He was the best. He never, ever joked when he tasted wine. He might joke about other wine tasters at other times – in fact, he often did. But he never joked *during* a wine tasting. It was too important. *He* was too important. He held the glass up to the light once more and looked at the deep red colour before finally putting the glass onto the table in front of him. He had made up his mind.

'Monsieur Colbert,' he said, as he placed his thumbs into the pockets of the red jacket he wore, the one that matched his tie so well. 'You are to be congratulated: this is an exceptionally fine wine with a strong bouquet and a rich fruity flavour with suggestions of blackcurrant; a wine to go well with any game or red meat, or to be enjoyed on its own for its excellent and strong personality . . .'

Monsieur Colbert smiled with delight. This was just what he had hoped to hear.

' . . . but,' Daniel Appleby went on as he took out his glasses from the pocket of his expensive jacket and put them on again, 'is this the right kind of wine for the customers of Happimart Supermarkets? They are used to wines that cannot compare with this quality. Their tastes are . . . er . . . less well-developed than those of people such as ourselves. I wonder if they would fully enjoy the finer qualities of this remarkable wine? I wonder if they would be prepared to *pay* more for such quality?'

The old man's smile disappeared. Monsieur Colbert was

proud of his wine but he was not a rich man. He had to sell his wine or go out of business. He was getting old and he owed a lot of money. He needed money if he was to retire with his wife, whose health had never been good since their only son, Jacques, had died two years before. This could be their last chance.

‘I promise you, Monsieur Appleby, that my wine is worth every franc; there is no better wine of this type in the region!’

Daniel Appleby smiled and picked up the glass again, holding it up against his fleshy nose and allowing the edge of the glass to brush against his neat sandy moustache. He breathed in deeply through his nose and sighed.

‘Ah, you are right, Monsieur Colbert – this is one of the best wines I have ever tasted!’ He stopped for a moment to think of the numerous examples of wine that had passed his lips. This was by far the finest, none of the others could compare with it. And it would be great to add this to the Happimart wine list, *his* wine list. But it would have to be on his terms, of course.

‘But,’ he continued, ‘there is little demand for expensive fine wines – not in our type of supermarkets. Oh, there are wealthy men who will always pay for quality, that is true. But are there enough, Monsieur Colbert, are there enough? The customer of today is the ordinary shopper, not the rich man. And there are a great many more ordinary shoppers than there are millionaires; the shoppers are the ones who make our money for us, Monsieur, and we have to please them, you can be sure of that.’

‘Just what exactly are you saying, Monsieur Appleby? Are you refusing to buy my wine because it is too good?’

asked Monsieur Colbert, his voice showing more anger than he had intended. Times had been bad and his small vineyard had always depended on the high prices that wines of superior quality fetch. But fewer people were prepared to pay for such luxuries now, and he knew that the Englishman from the supermarket was quite aware of this. He didn't want to lose his business completely. He would have to see what he was offered and hope for the best.

'I am saying, Monsieur,' said Appleby, finally, 'that Happimart Supermarkets always try to offer the best value for their customers. *We* are experts at selling for the best prices on the market and *you* are expert at making quality wine. I say we can combine our abilities and offer our customers the finest wines at prices they can afford.'

Monsieur Colbert was not familiar with Appleby's way of doing business. He liked people to be direct and open when they were dealing with him.

'And what exactly are your terms, Monsieur Appleby?' he asked.

Daniel Appleby played with his glass as he spoke, admiring the rich dark colour of the wine as he held it up to the light from the window. He was used to moments like this, and enjoyed them almost as much as the fine wines he loved.

'My terms are the terms Happimart offers to all the smaller vineyards it does business with. We like to see fine wines made, but we are realistic about today's market. We offer to buy your vineyard from you and take the responsibility from your hands, while employing you to be in charge of wine production . . .'

‘But Monsieur . . . ?’ Monsieur Colbert did not like the sound of the idea.

‘Well, naturally we wouldn’t expect you to produce the wine by yourself! Our expert production staff would work under your direction. That way you have the best of everything – you continue to make wine but you have the money from the sale of your vineyard and a contract from Happimart, too. A very fine offer, I think you’ll agree. . .’

What Appleby didn’t mention was that once the ‘production staff’ had learned everything about Colbert’s ways of producing his wine, Happimart would find some reason to get rid of him.

Old Monsieur Colbert spoke again.

‘This vineyard has been in my family for generations, Monsieur; it means a lot to me and the honour of my family name. What price are you offering for a wine which was good enough for the Emperor Napoleon himself?’

Daniel Appleby smiled and he named an amount that took the old man’s breath away. It was far, far less than old Colbert had hoped for. But it would be just enough to pay back the money he owed and have a little left over. And he would have a job, at least. He would have to retire later than he had wanted to but he was used to working.

Old Colbert recovered himself and spoke. ‘Monsieur, will you allow me a few moments alone to think over your offer?’

‘Certainly, Monsieur. Take as long as you need, though I will have to leave soon. It would be a pity to go without having our business brought to . . . er . . . a happy conclusion. I will take a walk around your vineyard for a while.’

Daniel Appleby went outside. It was late afternoon. He could see the rows of vines stretching out in the golden light of the sun. He had hardly gone more than a few metres when he stopped. He knew that if his offer was not accepted the old man would lose everything. He would be no different from all the other small wine producers who had failed to meet the demands of the modern market. No different but for one thing: this wine was the finest he had ever tasted and he *had* to be the one to get it.

He got it. Half an hour later the agreement was signed. As Daniel Appleby drove to the airport he carried with him the signed agreement for Happimart's latest buy.

In a room in a chateau in Bordeaux an old man cried.

* * *

Daniel Appleby took a taxi from the airport to his expensive flat in London. He was happy with the way things had gone. It had been just like all the other times. Sometimes the small vineyards produced wines that sold well and sometimes they didn't, but Happimart always made money. If the vineyards didn't make enough money Happimart could always sell them again – there was always some way to make money. If the previous owners were not left with any way of making a living it was not Happimart's problem. That was the way of the world.

Daniel Appleby was looking forward to a new future with the Happimart company. He had been invited to be the presenter in a television show Happimart were paying for. It was a show all about food and drink called *Dinner Party*, and he would be the show's expert on wines. He would be able to do what he had always wanted: to spend

all of his time eating and drinking the finest food and wine. He would show off his expert knowledge, thoroughly enjoy himself, *and* he would be paid very well.

Yes, he had everything planned. His future looked bright. Soon he would no longer have to taste all the awful cheap wines Happimart usually sold to its stupid customers. He looked at the lights of the city as the evening sun was setting. The sky was yellow and orange and red. It was beautiful.

Unfortunately, he didn't notice the other car as it lost control and crashed into his taxi.

* * *

The doctors all agreed that Daniel Appleby was a lucky man. He had hit his head against the taxi door and had been knocked out. The taxi driver had escaped with cuts and bruises. Even the taxi had not been damaged beyond repair. The only sign of the accident left on Daniel was a small cut just above his nose. It could have been a lot worse.

Daniel had to stay in hospital for a day for observation, just to make sure that he was all right. He did not really mind. The only thing Daniel was not looking forward to was hospital food. The food served by hospitals was plain and very different from the kind of cooking he was used to. He did not mind plain food – a nice lobster cooked in its shell, or perhaps a simple steak served with a basic green salad. Maybe just fresh bread with a good cheese and a glass of cool white wine. He was willing to go without when he had to.

When his first meal arrived he was horrified. It was

burger, chips and peas with a glass of orange juice. It looked awful. It tasted worse. Daniel had to call the nurse.

‘Nurse,’ he told her. ‘This burger tastes like salty cardboard, the chips are like soap, the peas are tasteless and hard and the orange juice is like old vinegar! Don’t you have any *fresh* food here? Are you trying to play some kind of joke on me or what?’

The nurse took away the food and he was brought a salad instead. Once again, Daniel Appleby complained that his food had no proper taste. The nurse had the food checked by the manager of the kitchen. The manager said it all tasted fine.

‘That manager’s tongue must be made out of rubber,’ Daniel replied in disgust.

The doctor was called and tests were made immediately on Daniel to see if anything was wrong. There *was* something wrong. The accident had caused some bleeding in Daniel’s brain. It had damaged the part of his brain that controlled his sense of smell. The result was that Daniel had almost completely lost his ability to smell things. Because the sense of taste depends very much on smell, all he had now were three basic tastes: salt, sweet and bitter. He couldn’t taste anything else. He could still enjoy the colour and feel of food, but none of it would taste of anything more than those three basic tastes, no matter what the food or drink was. That’s what the doctor told him.

But, apart from that, he was fine.

‘Of course I’m fine! Now can I go home?’ he asked, impatiently. The doctor told him he could and that was what he did.

But this time he went home on the bus.

* * *

The first thing he did when he got home was book a table at his favourite French restaurant. He did not believe for one moment that his famous nose and tongue were no longer as sensitive as they used to be. It had only been a minor accident. No, a good meal, a glass of good wine and he would soon be back to his old ways. As for hospital food, well . . . everybody knows what *that* is like: it *always* tastes disgusting. In fact, cardboard would be an improvement on that awful rubbish.

After a bath and a shave he was all ready. He put on his favourite clothes, including his spotted tie and red jacket. He was looking forward to his meal. As always before eating out, he drank nothing stronger than water – he did not want any other tastes to spoil the sensitivity of his tongue. He had also arranged to meet Justin, his immediate boss and one of Happimart's chief marketing managers. Justin had left a message on his answerphone. He wanted to know if the Bordeaux business with old Colbert had been successful. Well, he would tell him the good news over a delicious meal.

* * *

They had the best table, the one overlooking the river.

Daniel recommended the veal with truffles and new potatoes in garlic butter. But first they must have Henri's famous onion soup. Henri was the best maker of soups in the business. The restaurant had brought him all the way from Provence in France just to make soups for them.

When the soup arrived, he waited for Justin to taste first. They had both turned down an aperitif and had drunk only mineral water to begin with. They had their wine glasses filled with wine from Burgundy, but they would only drink it *after* the soup – they didn't want to spoil it.

Justin tasted. He was a tall man of about thirty-five, with neat blond hair and a body which had once been fit but had got fatter with lots of good food. He wore an expensive suit and had the look of a man who was used to getting his own way. He was almost as fond of good food and wine as Daniel. In fact, it had been Justin's idea to produce *Dinner Party* for television with Daniel as one of its stars.

'Daniel, my dear boy, this soup is fantastic! Henri has never made better!'

Daniel smiled. Good old Henri! He took a spoonful of soup and put it into his mouth. He waited a moment for the heat of the soup to go down a little, while his tongue took in the flavour.

Salt!

All he could taste was salt! It tasted so terrible that he nearly spat out the soup.

Justin noticed.

'Daniel – whatever is the matter? Are you all right?'

Justin, he observed, had already swallowed two spoonfuls of the soup. Justin's taste was almost as expert as Daniel's, yet he had liked it. Could those doctors have been right? Had he really lost his famous sense of taste?

These thoughts flashed through his mind in an instant. This was hardly the time to admit anything about the loss of his sense of taste – not to a man who was going to give him a job that depended on it! He would have to pretend