

was good enough to be recognized, and Pratt seemed to take pleasure in showing his knowledge.

The meal began with a plate of fish, fried in butter, and to go with it there was a Mosel wine. Mike got up and poured the wine himself, and when he sat down again, I could see that he was watching Richard Pratt. He had set the bottle in front of me so that I could read its name. It said, 'Geierslay Ohligsborg 1945'. He leaned over and whispered to me that Geierslay was a small village in the Mosel area, almost unknown outside Germany. He said that this wine we were drinking was something unusual, and that so little of this wine was produced that it was almost impossible for a stranger to get any of it. He had visited Geierslay personally the summer before in order to obtain the few bottles that they had allowed him to have.

'I doubt whether anyone else in the country has any of it at the moment,' he said.

I saw him look again at Richard Pratt. 'The great thing about Mosel,' he continued, raising his voice, 'is that it's the perfect wine to serve before a claret. A lot of people serve a Rhine wine instead, but that's because they don't know any better.'

Mike Schofield was a man who had become very rich very quickly and now also wanted to be considered someone who understood and enjoyed the good things in life.

'An attractive little wine, don't you think?' he added. He was still watching Richard Pratt. I could see him give a quick look down the table each time he dropped his head to take a mouthful of fish. I could almost feel him waiting for the moment when Pratt would drink his first drop, and look up from his glass with a smile of pleasure, perhaps even of surprise, and then there would be a discussion and Mike would tell him about the village of Geierslay.

But Richard Pratt did not taste his wine. He was too deep in conversation with Mike's eighteen-year-old daughter, Louise. He

was half turned towards her, smiling at her, telling her, as far as I could hear, some story about a cook in a Paris restaurant. As he spoke, he leaned closer and closer to her, and the poor girl leaned as far as she could away from him, smiling politely and looking not at his face but at the top button of his dinner jacket.

We finished our fish, and the servant came round and took away the plates. When she came to Pratt, she saw that he had not yet touched his food, so she waited, and Pratt noticed her. He quickly began to eat, pushing the pieces of fish into his mouth with rapid movements of his fork. Then, when he had finished, he reached for his glass, and in two short swallows he poured the wine down his throat and turned immediately to continue his conversation with Louise Schofield.

Mike saw it all. I was conscious of him sitting there, very still, looking at his guest. His round, cheerful face seemed to loosen slightly, but he controlled himself and said nothing.

Soon the servant came forward with the second course. This was a large joint of roast meat. She placed it on the table in front of Mike, who stood up and cut it very thinly, laying the pieces gently on the plates for her to take to the guests. When everyone had been served, he put down the knife and leaned forward with both hands on the edge of the table.

'Now,' he said, speaking to all of us but looking at Richard Pratt. 'Now for the claret. I must go and get it, if you'll excuse me.'

'Get it?' I said. 'Where is it?'

'In my study, already open; it's breathing.'

'Why the study?'

'It's the best place in the house for a wine to reach room temperature. Richard helped me to choose it last time he was here.'

At the sound of his name, Richard looked round.

'That's right, isn't it?' Mike said.

'Yes,' Pratt answered seriously. 'That's right.'