

quite a bit about this wine business, you know. Heavens, girl, I'm your father and you don't think I'd make you do – do something you didn't want to do, do you? I'm trying to make you some money.'

'Mike!' his wife said sharply. 'Stop it now, Mike, please!'

Again, he ignored her. 'If you will take this bet,' he said to his daughter, 'in ten minutes you'll be the owner of two large houses.'

'But I don't want two large houses, Daddy.'

'Then sell them. Sell them back to him immediately. I'll arrange all that for you. And then, just think of it, my dear, you'll be rich! You'll be independent for the rest of your life!'

'Oh, Daddy, I don't like it. I think it's silly.'

'So do I,' the mother said. 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Michael, for even suggesting such a thing! Your own daughter, too!'

Mike did not look at her. 'Take it!' he said eagerly, looking hard at the girl. 'Take it, quickly! I promise you won't lose.'

'But I don't like it, Daddy.'

'Come on, girl. Take it!'

Mike was pushing her hard. He was leaning towards her, and fixing her with two bright, determined eyes, and it was not easy for his daughter to refuse him.

'But what if I lose?'

'I keep telling you, you can't lose.'

'Oh, Daddy, must I?'

'I'm making you a fortune. So come on now. What do you say, Louise? All right?'

For the last time, she paused. Then she gave a helpless little movement of the shoulders and said, 'Oh, all right, then. Just so long as you swear there's no danger of losing.'

'Good!' Mike cried. 'That's fine! Then it's a bet!'

'Yes,' Richard Pratt said, looking at the girl. 'It's a bet.'

Immediately, Mike picked up the wine and walked excitedly

round the table, filling up everybody's glasses. Now everybody was watching Richard Pratt, watching his face as he reached slowly for his glass with his right hand and lifted it to his nose. The man was about fifty years old and he did not have a pleasant face. Somehow, it was all mouth – mouth and lips – the full, wet lips of the professional epicure. The lower lip hung down in the centre, a permanently open taster's lip. Like a keyhole, I thought, watching it; his mouth is like a large wet keyhole.

Slowly he lifted the glass to his nose. The point of his nose entered the glass and moved over the surface of the wine. He moved the wine gently around in the glass to smell it better. He closed his eyes, and now the whole top half of his body, the head and neck and chest, seemed to become a kind of large sensitive smelling-machine.

Mike, I noticed, was sitting back in his chair, trying to appear unconcerned, but he was watching every movement. Mrs Schofield, the wife, sat upright at the other end of the table, looking straight ahead, her face tight with disapproval. The daughter, Louise, had moved her chair away a little and sideways, facing the epicure, and she, like her father, was watching closely.

For at least a minute, the smelling process continued; then, without opening his eyes or moving his head, Pratt lowered the glass to his mouth and poured in almost half the wine. He paused, his mouth full, getting the first taste. And now, without swallowing, he took in through his lips a thin breath of air which mixed with the wine in the mouth and passed on down into his lungs. He held his breath, blew it out through his nose, and finally began to roll the wine around under his tongue.

It was an impressive performance.

'Um,' he said, putting down the glass, moving a pink tongue over his lips. 'Um – yes. A very interesting little wine – gentle and graceful. We can start by saying what it is *not*. You will pardon me for doing this carefully, but there is much to lose. Usually I would