

McGraw-Hill Paperbacks

U.S./\$4.95 CAN/\$5.95

*A Novel* **A DAY  
WITHOUT  
SUNSHINE**  
**LES WHITTEN**



*Les Whitten*

---

# A DAY WITHOUT SUNSHINE

**McGraw-Hill Book Company**

New York   St. Louis   San Francisco  
Bogotá   Guatemala   Hamburg   Lisbon  
Madrid   Mexico   Montreal   Panama  
Paris   San Juan   São Paulo  
Tokyo   Toronto

*For the seed of this book's theme and for her advice I am grateful to Sidney Moore. I am also grateful for editorial and research help to Lisa Cannon, Martie Chidsey, B. K. Chun, Perry Knowlton, Bernard Leason, Leslie Milk, Ellen and Richard Miller, William Moore, Natalie Neviasser, Phyllis Chasanow-Richman, Archie Smith III, Manya B. Stoetzel, Thomas Stewart, David Vaughan, Phyllis Whitten, and among others, the Austrian, British, French, and Portuguese embassies, the Library of Congress, the Montgomery County, Maryland, library system.*

Copyright © 1985 by Athanor, Inc.

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Except as permitted under the Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a data base or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Reprinted by arrangement with Atheneum

First McGraw-Hill Paperback edition, 1986

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 A G A G 8 7 6

**ISBN 0-07-069961-5**

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Whitten, Les, 1928—

A day without sunshine.

(McGraw-Hill paperbacks)

I. Title.

[PS3573.H566D38 1986] 813'.54 86-7370

ISBN 0-07-069961-5 (pbk.)

There's an old French saying: "A day without wine is a day without sunshine." There will be plenty of days without sunshine unless retired investigative reporter Aubrey Warder and his unlikely colleague, the beautiful Baroness, can foil the machinations of an international wine cartel!

"The romance plus the imperiled characters plus a plot that never slows down (most exciting is a chase across five countries) add up to one superior mystery."

—COSMOPOLITAN

"Pace as riveting as today's fastest-breaking exposes . . . Characters as vivid as anything in the most impelling international scams . . . an enthralling plot that only a master story-teller could conceive. *A DAY WITHOUT SUNSHINE* is Les Whitten at his dramatic best."

—JACK ANDERSON

"This time Whitten, an always enjoyable, ex-Washington newshawk, spins out a romantic melodrama about cornering the world wine market . . . Whitten writes with a hard, crisp, warm humanism that goes down neatly with his splendid joy ride."

—KIRKUS

"Entertaining and innovative."

—BOOKLIST

## *Books by Les Whitten*

---

<i>A Day Without Sunshine</i>	1985
<i>A Killing Pace</i>	1983
<i>Washington Cycle (POEMS)</i>	1979
<i>Sometimes a Hero</i>	1979
<i>Conflict of Interest</i>	1976
<i>The Alchemist</i>	1973
<i>F. Lee Bailey (BIOGRAPHY)</i>	1971
<i>The Abyss, TRANSLATIONS FROM CHARLES BAUDELAIRE</i>	1970
<i>Pinion, the Golden Eagle</i>	1968
<i>Moon of the Wolf</i>	1967
<i>Progeny of the Adder</i>	1965

*For my brothers:  
Harvey and Stanley*

## THE SOUL OF WINE

Within the bottle's depths, the wine's soul sang one  
night:

"Dear disinheriteds, I give you willingly

"From my imprisoning glass which scarlet wax seals tight

"An anthem full of light and warm fraternity!

"I know how much it takes on hillsides turned to flame

"Of labor and of sweat, of cooking suns to fuel

"And fructify my life and give my soul a name.

"I'm not ungrateful, no; my nature is not cruel.

"I'll take enormous joy in pouring like a wave

"Into the mouth of one whose work has made him old.

"His overheated chest is like a gentle grave;

"And I'll be happier there than in the cellar's cold.

"Do you hear Sunday choirs that echo in my throat,

"And hope that babbles in my palpitating breast?

"With elbows by your plate and sleeves rolled on your  
coat

"You'll glorify me as you put your cares to rest . . ."

*Charles Baudelaire*

TRANSLATED BY LESLIE H. WHITTEN

## Contents

---

1	<i>Bethany Von Mohrwald</i>	1
2	<i>Aubrey</i>	21
3	<i>The Wine Press I</i>	33
4	<i>Robert St. Gage</i>	42
5	<i>The Wine Press II</i>	50
6	<i>California Look</i>	59
7	<i>The Laboratory</i>	79
8	<i>Contacts</i>	94
9	<i>Maier's Folly</i>	103
10	<i>The Witwe</i>	114
11	<i>English Soil</i>	119
12	<i>The Pathologist</i>	136
13	<i>Duddman Revisited</i>	150
14	<i>The Suspect</i>	160
15	<i>The Mystery of El Kebir</i>	178
16	<i>The Vines of Ambourg-Repose</i>	185
17	<i>St. Gage's Choice</i>	200
18	<i>The Cellars of Ambourg-Repose</i>	218
19	<i>Buckwheats</i>	239
20	<i>The Surveillance</i>	245
21	<i>The Auction</i>	262
22	<i>Midnight Summons</i>	284
23	<i>Mummy and Daddy</i>	292
24	<i>The Vineyards of Douro</i>	314



viii CONTENTS

25	<i>The Garbage Gulch</i>	323
26	<i>The Dagger</i>	339
27	<i>Making Tracks</i>	359
28	<i>The Trolleys</i>	379
29	<i>The Witwe II</i>	391
30	<i>The Laboratory II</i>	407
31	<i>Adieus</i>	422
32	<i>The Phylloxerans</i>	428
33	<i>Vincet St. Gage</i>	446
34	<i>California Sun</i>	457
35	<i>The Mausoleum</i>	469
36	<i>Phoebe Hills Vineyards</i>	483

## BETHANY VON MOHRWALD

With a boyish whoop, Franz von Mohrwald called to his wife Bethany as she worked in the sunny shed, transferring young grape cuttings to boxes so they could be taken to the nursery of their vineyard.

"Big business, *meine kleine Bäuerin*"—peasantling—he called her, a nickname she liked for its endearment and, in recent days, silently bridled at for its reminder of the limited life they lived. He waved a letter on cream-colored stationery at her. Bethany looked at her husband's mobile face, smiled back at him, and snatched the letter from his hand. At the top was the engraved name, "William Carnavan Bridsey," and she knew it was going to be big business indeed.

Bridsey was the chief and only operating Bridsey of the House of Bridsey and Sons, Ltd., of London. They were major importers of Bordeaux, owned some acreage there and in Portugal, and

## 2 A DAY WITHOUT SUNSHINE

distributed French and other wines to Britain, the Commonwealth, and the United States.

Bethany recalled meeting Bridsey at wine convocations, a brash, mustached sergeant major of a man who thundered his opinions on world trade to all who would listen. Given his power, all did. The letter asked whether he could visit them Tuesday next on "an interesting business matter."

No more than that. But clearly it suggested the purchase of wines, and because Bridsey himself was coming, lots of wines. The von Mohrwald's vineyard, beside Neusiedlersee, a lake in Austria's Burgenland, sold its wines through a Vienna shipper. By selling directly to Bridsey at English wholesale prices, they could do without the shipper and make a good 6 to 10 percent more than at present.

Bethany threw her arms around Franz and kissed him soundly on the lips. For the last two years the weather had been disastrous all along the lake: too wet in spring, too cold too early. Their bad crops had occurred simultaneously with low prices for Austrian wines.

She knew the books as well as Franz, for he shared all the business problems with her. Two more bad years would force them to sell off the greatest part of their land if they hoped to keep anything at all.

Their château, Schloss von Mohrwald, had been built during the middle years of the great Austrian wine era from 1526 to 1780. It was modeled on Durnstein, a larger, more famous castle, but had never been finished. Nevertheless, it had a restored keep, a small chapel listed in Baedeker and Fodor, and a dining room whose windows looked out over

the vineyards to the placid, aquamarine lake two hundred yards away.

Over the centuries, the von Mohrwalds had neither aspired to nor achieved more than the modest distinction of ~~minor nobility~~. They produced a singularly fine table wine, Mohrwalden Maximiliansehre, many salable ones, and a strain of industrious, loyal, optimistic wine men and women.

Franz was the present Baron von Mohrwald. Bethany had been a countess, but had taken the lesser rank of baroness when they married. She too, however, traced a family line back to the von Mohrwalds. So, in fact, they were fifth cousins.

He was a handsome, dark-haired man of forty-five who knew his Rieslings, muskatellers, and green veltliners as well as any man in Austria. He and Bethany had moved with the times and their 504 acres were clean and spruce, the equipment modern and well-maintained. Their holdings, among the largest in Austria, were devoted mainly to the more ordinary and thus more profitable pressings. But in the family tradition, they continued to produce exportable quantities of the Maximiliansehre.

Franz's vices were unextraordinary: some over-indulgence of a married daughter and of their two sons, the younger away at a *gymnasium*, a classical high school, in Salzburg, the older at the University of Cologne (he would be heir to the vineyard); a five-year-old Mercedes convertible with all the trimmings; and two intermittent dalliances with married women of his own class.

Bethany von Mohrwald had once thought she would do more than grow grapes. She had been reared in part by an English nanny, had the right

## 4 A DAY WITHOUT SUNSHINE

schooling at the Wiener Musikhochschule, and had earned a degree in art history at Munich. But nothing artistic quite took. With a substantial dowry, she had married the busy, ambitious Franz.

Once she was settled at Schloss von Mohrwald which, though hereditarily Franz's, was bound as close in terms of blood to her, she found her calling. She thrived on the feel of the dirt, the rough twiggage of the cuttings, the sensuous pulp of grapes, the intractable crush of the press, frothing up the wine-to-be. She loved her husband, and though (almost without qualification) she was faithful to him, she was of lustier stock.

Blond, trim, youthful herself at forty-two in a fresh Nordic way, she deftly avoided the advances of Austrians and of foreigners at wine gatherings. Her one lapse into adultery had been brief, discreet, and dangerously romantic.

Recently, however, she had felt an unaccountable restlessness. At its worst, it was a pondering over whether "this is all there is," accompanied by sharp but unspecific yearnings. But with it all, she, like Franz, had remained charming and even naive in a world where so few escape the long stretches of suffering which are the death of both charm and naiveté.

When William Bridsey arrived at Schloss von Mohrwald, worsted-clad, with a tweed hat and a burlled cane, he leaned to kiss Bethany's hand. His heavy pomade distracted her. Four generations of middlemanning, she thought, had not made him a gentleman.

Bridsey and Franz, after observing further amenities, took off for a drive in the von Mohrwald

Land Rover to inspect the vineyards while Bethany inspected the luncheon fixings.

In sterling buckets embossed with Hapsburgian eagles, she iced three different commercial wines and one pale green bottle of Maximiliansehre, around whose graceful neck hung a tiny replica of the Paris gold medals of 1889 and 1900.

Recalling her guest's portliness, Bethany and the cook produced a lunch of fresh asparagus, Neusiedlersee trout, veal quenelles with a light cream sauce, and a slam-bang ending: American McIntosh apples with strong, Austrian goat cheese.

During the meal, Bridsey wolfed the asparagus, botched the deboning of the trout, and gnashed the quenelles as if they were French fried eel chunks.

With the wines, however, he was punctiliously discriminating. As each was offered for his tasting, he rolled it in his mouth and looked ceiling-ward as he weighed it against the countless others he had sampled over the years. Bethany could almost imagine his brain through the slick, thick hair, measuring how well each would sell in the English-speaking markets against Moselles and Rhines, Alsatian Rieslings and Gewurztraminers, the new Yugoslavian and other eastern wines.

It was between the cheese and coffee that Franz said carefully, "Bethany, I asked Mr. Bridsey to put off our talk of his," he paused, "... mission until all three of us could discuss it."

"And may I add, baroness," Bridsey purred, savoring the title, "I am delighted to see a husband so very, very much in tune with women's rights."

Bethany nodded pleasantly, thinking "horse manure," and wishing the butler-handyman would

appear with the homemade *obstler* fruit schnapps. As if by extrasensory summons, he entered, and poured drops of the clear liquid in fluted crystal glasses. Bridsey, with the same almost feminine precision, picked up the glass, sniffed, and took a sip.

"Superb!" he resonated. "Incredibly Austrian. Royal! Would you were putting *this* up for export."

"We only make three cases a year," said Bethany sweetly. "There would not be much profit for you in that."

Franz cast a blink of disapproval at Bethany, then looked back at Bridsey, less grateful for his praise than expectant. A bit patronizing—the descendant of tradesmen talking from a position of strength to old nobility—Bridsey began.

"Baron, baroness. I will mince no words. More and more, particularly when I visit such historic acres as these, I feel myself drawn again to the soil, the earth, looking for new challenges. Challenges," he reemphasized, finding in that word the tone he wanted to convey.

Bethany wanted to squirm. Challenges? Poppycock. Everyone knew about the variety and extent of his holdings. Drawn to the soil? The only interest he had in soil was in extracting gold from it. She glanced at Franz to see whether she dared risk a bit more tartness, a look that Bridsey, self-important but no dolt, did not miss.

Bridsey went on. "I and some of my colleagues—they wish to remain behind the whiffle trees for the nonce, so to speak—are planning a company to, um, buy up a few vineyards making good table wines."

He looked as if he might again slip into circumlocution but with a sigh that ruffled his grenadier's mustache, he bit into the meat of his proposal. "We are prepared to make a substantial offer for the von Mohrwald vineyards, with you, of course, managing them, and continuing to produce their splendid nectars."

Franz and Bethany were stunned. They had expected a proposal to buy their wines, not their land, vine stock, cellars, and all. Bridsey hurried on, hoping to win them over before they could object.

"In the alternative, we would take a long-term lease on your acres, unless, of course, you wanted to keep apart your unmatched Maximiliansehre."

"Such a surprise," Franz interjected. "We had thought . . ."

"No, no," broke in Bridsey forcefully. "Do *not* think, not yet. Let me first give you my details, please, please!"

From the inside pocket of his tailored coat, he drew out a paper. Drawing closer to the table, he handed a copy to Franz, then his own talking copy to Bethany. As she read, she realized how formidably his verbal inadequacies camouflaged his pecuniary shrewdness.

The figures on the paper were disturbingly correct as to the financial condition of Schloss von Mohrwald, right down to their burden of loans. The summary of their acreage, their plantings, their past and present production could hardly have been more accurate if they had done it themselves.

Yet the price Bridsey was offering was far above the vineyard's appraised worth, enough above it so they could easily keep up the Schloss and a few



acres surrounding it during their and their children's lives. Bethany did some quick calculations in her head. No matter how Bridsey hyped the von Mohrwald's production, he would still lose large sums in today's market.

She started to burst out with a question on it, but deferred to Franz.

"It is generous past all . . .," her husband began (for a moment she thought he was going to say "past all wisdom"), ". . . what we could have imagined. We would want to give it some long and deep consideration."

Once again Bridsey broke in. "Of course, baron. But I must warn you and you, baroness, that there is a caveat emptor, or rather a caveat seller, whatever that would be in Latin. You would know; I would not.

"I, and my colleagues, would need to know in a week or two, to have it on the bottom line as the Americans say. The financing, you understand: it is here today, solid as a rock, I assure you. But one cannot be sure it will be here tomorrow . . ."

Franz stepped in. "In two weeks? You are asking us to make up our minds in two weeks . . ."

Now Bethany, shaken, could not hold back. "After over four hundred years?"

The unintentional reminder to Bridsey of his plebeian lineage, combined with his present superior positioning, almost made him bark at them. But, face flushed, he said calmly, "In a fortnight, yes. We are making a number of inquiries. Other enterprises such as ours may also be. I do not know. But you, as well as anyone, understand the tumult these days."