

Opening scene: World famous professor of theoretical physics, Giovanni Ciccotti is fighting for his very life in a guarded isolation room in the intensive care unit in Toronto General Hospital. Struck ill at a festive banquet to honor his closest friend Ray Kapral's 65th birthday party, which was held at the exclusive "Hart House" of the university of Toronto. Outside, in a private waiting room, his family and closest friends are waiting for an update from the physician. The Ciccotti entourage includes, Professor Kapral and wife Maureen, Giovanni's diva wife Nicoletta, another birthday celebrant, Professor Stu Whittington and wife Ann, Professors John Valleau and wife Jean, and Jeremy Schofield and wife Nathalie, organizers of the event, and university staff members Margeau LaFite and Steward Louis Le Cork. We join their conversation in progress:

"These Canadian hospitals are fantastic, this private waiting room is luxurious, fitting indeed for a patient of my husband's international renown" said Nicoletta.

"Actually, I think that because my daughter is an internist here, she may have pulled some strings to get us this private room- and well, Maureen has worked here for years too" explained Ray.

"So much for the egalitarianism of socialized medicine" – scoffed the card carrying communist John Valleau

"Actually", announced a strange voice at the door, "you are all here for one reason – to help me determine who has tried to take the life of Professor Ciccotti".

"Take the life – you mean this was not a health related heart problem due overindulgence in food and drink combined with lack of physical exercise?" Exclaimed Ray.

"No – these papers I am holding are the latest toxicology report from the lab – Professor Ciccotti has been POISONED! No one is allowed to leave this room, I need to know each of your movements since Professor Ciccotti's arrival in this country"

"Who are you to be questioning us?" inquired Nicoletta –

"I am Sgt. Cuff of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Madame"

“I’ve heard of him”, whispers Jeremy to Stu, “isn’t he the “take no guff Cuff” who always gets his man?”

“As you are a man who obviously knows much” said Cuff to Jeremy, “I’ll start with you. Please be precise, in a case such as this, time and details are of the utmost importance.”

Fade to the scene just two days earlier

“Giovanni you made it!” Exclaimed Ray - “Never mind that – where are my shoes?” announced Giovanni.

Ray laughed good-naturedly, “the shoes, always the shoes, you would think that you had come not to celebrate my birthday but to get the damned shoes!” “Maureen is bringing them directly to dinner at the Chancellor’s high table. We have to hurry there now Giovanni, there is no time to waste, we just have enough time to pick up The Valleaus on the way. Where is Nicoletta, is she joining us this evening? Will there be room for everyone in your rental car or should we take two vehicles?”

“A second car will not be necessary my dear friend, we can all fit in my UPGRADED vehicle”, said Giovanni. “The lovely Nicoletta alas will not be joining us until tomorrow evening. She has a bit of an headache after the trip and well... you know she can only take so many evenings in a row in the company of SCIENTISTS!!!” “Okay -Hop into my wheels they are just outside the door, I had a very tricky time fitting my beauty into the miserly parking space that the university has delegated for visitors.”

“He’s too much”, Jeremy said to Stu and Ray as they follow on Giovanni’s heels out the door to the awaiting whale of an SUV.

Giovanni escorted Ray, Stu and Jeremy into his boat-sized UPGRADED SUV. Giovanni is grinning with pride as they board the boat. “How do you like my Upgrade? Is this not beautiful? It is the size of an entire Roman apartment complex! I feel like a SUPERSIZED American in this lovely machine. We will all ride in style. Now lead me to the Valleaus.”

“This is indeed something Giovanni”, said Ray, “I’m sure John and Jean will be STUNNED! I’m not sure that they will actually get into this thing,

you know what passionate environmentalists they are. They are very concerned about their Carbon Footprints”

“Carbon Footprints! HA!”, said Giovanni, “What is this foolishness? I will see about this – lead me to these Green Party Rabble Rousers!”

“We need to drive just a bit further - up to where the group is picketing at the Med Building Construction site – there just over there”, Stu points to a group of 50 or so earth – loving faculty, staff and students who are peacefully chanting and holding picket signs that read “SAVE THE KIRKLAND WARBLERS – THIS FAR NO FURTHER” “WARBLERS IN – CORPORATE MEDICINE OUT”

“What is this – who are these Kirkland’s and why are they Warbeling?” said Giovanni.

“They are an endangered species of wood warbler Giovanni, one of the rarest small birds on Earth”, said Stu, “Haven’t you heard about this? It has been all over the ornithology listserves. Right here, at the University of Toronto, there is a breeding pair of Kirkland’s warblers. Right here! Unfortunately they arrived the day after the groundbreaking ceremony for the new medical sciences building – many of us want construction postponed, or even stopped all together – until the pair successfully breeds! It is really exciting! Look – I think the Valleaus have spotted us – they are actually leading the cause for the cessation of the construction until after the chicks have fledged”

“How could they not have seen us in this tub” mutters Jeremy to Ray.

“Friends – it is I Giovanni – here to escort you in my beautiful DENALI SUV! Don’t worry we can all fit in, you and your bikes – the salesman said that I could fit 15 people and their gear comfortably!!”

“You cannot honestly think that I am going to step into that Gas Guzzling Monstrosity!”, said John, “What are you thinking Giovanni – have you gone mad?”

“It is not I Giovanni that is mad, it is you with your foolishness protesting over little birds. Can this bird cure cancer? I think not - but the medical

school could cure cancer – you are being FOOLISH John and Jean. Now stop this nonsense and get into the car so we are not late”

“FOOLISH?!”, said John, “You are the one being wasteful and foolish! You are KILLING the planet Giovanni – You are KILLING US ALL! Jean and I will bike to the chancellor’s quarters and we will probably get there faster than you will in this CARBON BURNING - GLOBAL WARMING DINOSAUR!” The Valleaus bike off in a HUFF.

“I am glad to see that John and Jean have not mellowed with age”, said Giovanni, “they are in fine form, I cannot wait to tease them at dinner! I don’t know why he is complaining about my lovely rental car- I got 9 miles to the gallon on the way from the airport and I drove FIRST CLASS” “I cannot wait to test my carbon footprint in my new shoes!”

SKIP TO DINNER AT THE CHANCELLOR’S residence...

“Ah there are Jean and John getting off of their little bikes.” Said Giovanni “Have you calmed yourself down dear friends?”

“Of course we are calm Giovanni”, said John, “there is nothing like a little self –propelled transport to let off some steam. We had best hurry to Highland House, the Chancellor is waiting for us at high table, this should be a special evening indeed”

As they approach the front entrance of the stately manor, they are greeted by an attractive young blonde woman dressed in a proper grey suit, with matching high heels. “I am Margeau LeFite, and I am the University’s special events coordinator. Ladies and Gentlemen - welcome to Highland House. You are all in for a wonderful evening – we are to meet the chancellor in the Whittington room for cocktails before dinner – please follow me”

“She looks very efficient – this Mademoiselle LaFite” says Giovanni to Ray. “It will be my pleasure to follow her to the –“WHITTINGTON ROOM?” Intriguing Stu – what is this? Is your family somehow responsible for this room or is this a coincidence” Says Giovanni as they pass through the doorway and into the walnut and cherry wood Victorian grandeur of the Whittington Exhibition Hall.

Stu's voice was apprehensive as he speaks ...“Well ..ah...yes, in fact this room is named after my great grandfather – Admiral Whittington. He was one of the University's earliest explorer-scientists.”

“Admiral Whittington gave the world many great discoveries” boomed the voice of Chancellor Valoren from behind them. “In his earliest and most famous voyage to the Amazon – he amassed an unrivaled anthropological and botanical collection. You have all heard of the drug “CURARE” – it is actually a skeletal muscular relaxant that revolutionized anesthesiology as we know it today, making surgery safer for all mankind. The Amazon natives had long known the sedative effects of the drug, they used it for hunting – and Admiral Whittington's first exploration team was responsible for bringing back many of these plants and the implements that the natives used to administer the drug”, The chancellor's voice suddenly changed tone “If fate hadn't intervened, Whittington's name would be as famous as Darwin's”

“My daughter tells me that they use a synthesized curare to this day as anesthesia for many complex surgeries” said Ray.

“Stu!”, exclaimed Giovanni – “what is this? – Why after all of these years that I have known you -you have never spoken about this illustrious ancestor? I ask again, what is this? – I need more information – what is this fateful twist that keeps your great grandfather confined to the halls of anonymity?”

“Giovanni” – Ray whispered softly - “I think you should drop this subject – I'll fill you in later”

“NO! I need to know NOW – if it is a secret – why is the room named WHITTINGTON? This invites the obvious questions that I am asking”.

The chancellor stepped in to stop the bickering – “Well, the last voyage that Whittington lead in command of the HMS Poodle – which was a quest to find the last nesting pair of the GREAT AUK, didn't go quite as well as the earlier expeditions had gone. Whittington, a great ornithologist, following up on a tip received via the INUIT people in northern Saskatchewan about the great sea penguins of the north, theorized that there were perhaps still nesting pairs of these great sea birds to be found – he thought that if he were to arrive in early spring, high above the arctic circle in the nesting grounds

he could capture and return with them. Early reports from the team confirmed the ecstatic news that the great beasts had been found and successfully trapped! Headlines around the world proclaimed Whittington a hero - Unfortunately, the spring of 1895 was unseasonably cold and the boats became trapped in the ice. After provisions ran low, the men became desperate. The expedition was rescued – days away from disaster. However, when the crew was found, they were feasting around a table on the remains of what was rumored to be – well, the last of the great auks!”

At this point the mild mannered, bird-loving Stu exploded in RAGE. “This is all just rumor, none of this can be proven” “I’m sure they must have been feasting on large chickens obtained from the locals or something ...If only I could find the missing expedition diaries and clear my family name!!!”

Giovanni was immediately entranced by this news – “You are saying that your relatives are responsible for the EXTINCTION of the great AUK?? This is AUKWARD indeed Stu! See your relatives understood that birds are birds and for eating, not for interrupting medical school building projects. Why don’t we take a page from admirable Admiral Whittington’s book and cook and eat the Kirkland’s Warblers!!!” HEE HEE

The mood had soured and the Whittington room erupted in bickering. Only the arrival of Maureen Kapral with Giovanni’s shoes saved the day.

“Maureen you are an angel indeed for remembering my beloved shoes!”

The Chancellor – by now completely stunned by the turn of events in the Whittington room, asked innocently, “What is the significance of these shoes Professor Ciccotti?”

“These SHOES are my beloved Timberland Mesa Ventilators – made right here in Canada - for busy individuals who need additional air flow to cool themselves as they go about their active days”

“Speaking of cooling off”, Margeau LaFite chimed in – “we need to be seated or our dinner will get cold –don’t worry there will be more time to review these fascinating artifacts from the Whittington expeditions after dinner”

As they turned to go into the adjoining dining room, Giovanni couldn't resist one last taunt directed at Stu - "What do you think they will be serving this evening Stu- fricassee of Auk Rosemarino? I hear great Auk tastes just like chicken!"

Dinner was a lovely affair and the Chancellor made sure that the conversation remained mostly in the "safe" zone. Giovanni managed to get in a few more jibes at Stu, John and Ray, but, as he was seated next to the lovely and "efficient" Margeau LaFite, he was distracted most of the time throughout the dinner.

After the meal was served the Chancellor made a very special announcement: "In honor of the exemplary service to this university, and to your scientific disciplines all these many years, I would like to invite our honorees, Professor Whittington and Professor Kapral to visit the University's private reserve wine cellar and each make a selection of one bottle from our extensive collection as a token of the University's appreciation for your dedication. Margeau will escort you down stairs to meet the University's wine steward sommelier – Louis Le Cork. He will help you in your selection and give you a tour. Due to climate controls, I would ask that you divide into two groups. Those that stay here will have the option of reviewing the Whittington artifacts or visiting the adjacent Portrait gallery. When one group returns, the other can go below in their place."

Ray was bursting with excitement. He had heard the rumors of the University's extensive wine collection – but he never dreamt that they were true, or that he would ever have a chance to see the collection and actually KEEP a bottle for himself. As a true wine aficionado, Ray had an exceptional collection of his own. He couldn't wait to get downstairs. Ray, Giovanni, John and Stu made up the first group and they followed Margeau to the cellar.

Margeau laughed as she saw Giovanni clutching the box of shoes. "Professor - You may certainly leave the shoes here in the Whittington room while we go to the basement. I'm sure you'll want both hands to examine the old wine bottles. Our collection is, I believe, one of the best of any university in the world." Giovanni sheepishly followed her instructions and left the shoes on one of the chairs near the exhibit hall.

As they descended the stairs, blaring fiddle music – some sort of a jig - could be heard emanating from one corner.

“What is this noise that is assaulting my ears as I descend into the temple of wines?” exclaimed Giovanni with his usual lack of tact. “It is sacrilege!”

“This is traditional Cajun music – you can clearly hear the similarities to the Acadian fiddling roots from which it is derived.”– explained a deep, irritated voice from behind the group. It was the university wine steward - Louis Le Cork. “You are a bit earlier than I expected, let me go turn this beautiful music down and then I can begin your tour”

“Thank you Monsieur” we will wait right here for you – said Margeau.

Ray’s eyes were budging at the sight of the HUNDREDS and HUNDREDS of bottles of wine arranged throughout this cavernous space. He couldn’t wait to get started. As if reading his mind, Louis Le Cork reappeared and began his official speech as if the earlier unpleasant interlude with Giovanni had not taken place.

“Bienvenue – and Welcome to MY cellar. The university’s collection is superb and it will be my pleasure to help you explore the holdings and help you choose your special bottle.

Le Cork described the layout of the cellar and then told them that they were free to explore. Stu and John headed off in one direction with Ms. LaFite while Giovanni and Ray hurried off into another section. “I think that we should go into the oldest section – things here seem to be arranged by country and by date”, said Ray. They scurried off and, as they explored, Ray became more and more excited.

“This is fantastic Giovanni – I can’t believe this! I am in paradise!”

“Gentlemen” - exclaimed the smooth voice of Miss LaFite, “you need to find your bottles in the next 10 minutes so that the other group has the opportunity to experience the cellar”

“HOLY SMOKES! Giovanni, you cannot believe what I have found! It is a bottle of Chateau Mouton Rothschild 1945!! This is one of the most expensive bottles of wine in the world – Forbes magazine said that one at

auction just went for \$35,000!” Ray was as giddy as a schoolgirl as he held his bottle in awe.

The dark voice of Le Cork spoke came from behind them “I’m sorry Professor but you cannot choose that bottle – it is of course, exceptionally valuable and generally reserved for our Nobel Laureates”

“But I was told I could select any bottle down here – if this was to be reserved why wasn’t it pulled, or put in a locked area? This is an outrage after all of my years of dedicated service to this university, it is a classic bait and switch”

Giovanni was stunned at the determined reaction of his mild mannered friend – clearly Ray was not in the mood to budge on this issue. His reaction was almost irrational.

“Look here dear friend, you need not have that bottle, there are many many beautiful bottles to choose from that are exquisite but not that expensive. I have found myself a full case of Chateau Margeaux 1963” “This Margeaux is a lovely bottle, let US instead choose the Margeaux!”

“How did this become an US?” Exclaimed Ray. “I want my Chateau Mouton Rothchild!”

Ms. LaFite, alarmed at the raised voices, came over immediately. “Gentleman – what is going on here”

“They want to take away the bottle that I chose!” Ray was now like a child whose favorite blankie was about to be confiscated.

Without hesitation, the efficient Ms. LaFite saved the day – “of course Professor Kapral may have the bottle, he was told he could have any bottle, and so shall it be. I’m sure that the Professor’s contributions to the University over these many many years more than make up for the expense. Why, I’ve heard that you theoreticians spend nearly as much on coffee makers as this bottle costs– now now Professor – you may keep your bottle, as promised.”

Ray was immediately relieved. Giovanni turned his attention to his own desires towards the Margeaux. “I would like to purchase a bottle of this

lovely Chateau Margeaux from the case that I found – certainly there is enough for me to purchase one of the many you seem to have”

Le Cork, irritated at Ms. LaFite’s generosity with HIS wine with Ray, now regained his authority. “You may not have a bottle of the Chateau Margeaux – not even to purchase – I’m afraid that case is designated to be auctioned in its entirety at a University fundraiser” “I’m just packing it for delivery now”

“Well”, protested Giovanni, now insulted, “I think you should take better care of your wines in this cellar, Monsieur Le Cork, - on this Margeaux the label is starting to pull off. Your humidity controls are obviously sub standard!”

Le Cork grabbed the bottle from Giovanni, a bit more vigorously than necessary. As he did so, Le Cork’s cell phone sprang to life. “Ah – what is this, said Giovanni, you must have an exceptional phone that it works underground in this cellar- let me see” With his hand on the “Margeaux” wine bottle Le Cork’s grip on his phone was slack and Giovanni was able to easily grab it from his hand. The caller ID read “Christy’s” –

“interesting....” Murmured Giovanni as Le Cork grabbed the cell phone back- “This phone is too rich for my blood”.

At this point Ms. LaFite began to escort them all back upstairs. Ray was clutching his bottle like it was his baby.

“I cannot wait to drink the Chateau Mouton Rothchild with my dear friend Ray at the banquet tomorrow evening” exclaimed Giovanni as they ascended.

“Drink it!” Ray was dead serious in his reply. “We’re not going to drink MY wine – this is an investment!!!”

SKIP FORWARD TO THE BANQUET

“OH no my evening is ruined – I forgot my shoes last night at the chancellor’s house” lamented Giovanni from the back of the hall as the banquet was about to begin.

At that moment, special event coordinator Margeau LaFite appeared with the shoebox, as if by magic. “I knew you would be missing these!” bubbled Margeau.

“You are indeed as efficient as I thought you were!” beamed Giovanni.

He opened the box and frowned. His shoelaces had been tied in an elaborate and seemingly impenetrable knot. “This is impossible, someone has tampered with my lovely shoes”, complained Giovanni

“Hurry Giovanni – they are starting with the processional music, we must get to the head table” said Ray. “Just cram your feet into the shoes without untying them and we’ll get you new laces later”

Giovanni pushed his feet into the knotted shoes. “I think I know who the trickster is...” said Giovanni as he stomped his feet down to get the shoes in place. “Ouch!” said Giovanni as he crammed his feet into the shoes and began to walk to the head table.

Louis Le Cork was serving wine to all of the honored guests seated at the head table- Ray and Maureen, John and Jean, Jeremy and Nathalie, Stu and Ann, Giovanni and Nicoletta, the Chancellor and Margeau LaFite. The minute Nicoletta was introduced to Margeau, her mood soured and turned icy. “Margeau – so this is the Margeau I hear you mumble about in your sleep last night” “You are a very very bad man Giovanni”

Just as Giovanni moved to defend himself to his beloved Nicoletta, he collapsed! “HELP HIM!”, screamed Nicoletta, “Giovanni has collapsed”.

Ray, although stunned, took immediate charge of the situation, “John, Louis and Jeremy – help me carry him out to the curb” “Margeau – call University police and ambulance services”

As they were carrying him out Nicoletta rushed to his side. In a raspy voice Giovanni’s last words before losing consciousness were “spogliate Margeau” – UNDRRESS Margeau –“Stronzo! Porco bastardo! Always Margeau!!”, exclaimed the distraught Nicoletta.

Fade to present and back to the waiting room...

“...and then they brought him here and we have been desperately waiting for an update as to his condition.” Said Jeremy. “You see – I don’t really know anything helpful, I’m sure you are just as baffled as we are...”

“OH Contraire”, says Sgt. Cuff. I know exactly who tried to harm Professor Ciccotti and by now – you should too!!!

I ask you the following:

- 1) Who tried to harm Professor Ciccotti?
- 2) How did they do it?
- 3) Why did they not succeed?

Audience tries to solve. Cuff then provides the answer as follows:

This case was baffling to me at first because it seems like Professor Ciccotti is a man who likes to push people to the end of their human endurance and patience levels. He taunts and jabs, and each of his jabs hits the mark in his victim’s Achilles heels. Everyone in this room had the means and opportunity to harm him –for we now know that the poison used to try to kill him came from the Whittington exhibition curare display – administered via poison dart through the soles of his beloved shoes - but the motive – must be strong indeed for such a brazen act!

To Stu and Ann, Cuff says – “Professor Whittington: we see Ciccotti attack your passion for birds and nature and further, he attacks your very family heritage and honor! Clearly he has no decency and such a man would have to be punished!” The shoes – which we now know contained the poison, have been tied in Flemish bend – it is a knot that jams very easily and is very difficult to untie, you’re an expert on knots Professor Whittington, are you not? Why leave such a calling card on the victim?

Stu replies “I wasn’t trying to kill him, just to irritate him the way he had been irritating me and my wife all evening! I would never harm him, he is too much fun!”

Cuff dismisses this and turns to John and Jean, “Professor Valleau by eliminating Ciccotti you eliminate a taunting and wasteful man from the planet. You effectively reduce global temperatures by 1 degree, just from his hot temper and breath!

John replies, “We were engaging in playful banter Sergeant, nothing more. What is the game without a worthy opponent? This is the very definition of academic inquiry – we would never do such a thing!”

To Ray Cuff exclaims “You – who has patiently been second banana to Ciccotti’s excess all these years, finally have a night to celebrate your accomplishments, and find the wine beyond your wildest expectations and fantasies, and Ciccotti hopes to take this from you as well!”

To Nicoletta he says, “Giovanni’s flirtations perhaps became too much for you. Between the incessant talk of the shoes for the duration of the flight and the latest flirtation with Ms Lafite, your Latin temper got the best of you.”

“BUT No, good people”, Cuff addresses them all, “the real reason that Prof. Ciccotti had to be silenced is that by his snooping and prying he inadvertently revealed the diabolical plans of Louis Le Cork – member of the Acadienne Secret Society of Sommelier Separatists”

“You mean he is an ASSS?! Exclaims John Valleau.

“Yes” replies cuff. “Your friend had stumbled onto the fact that Le Cork had been disguising very expensive rare wine as the less valuable, but still respectable, Chateau Margeaux. He then was able to remove the fake Margeaux labels, and sell these cases of Chateau Mouton Rothschild – funneling his ill gotten gains to his extremist group.”

“We are only interested in preserving the Wines of a great long suffering people – in the wine there is strength!” Le Cork shouted as he pulled a corkscrew out of his pocket. “One step further Cuff and I’ll uncork the eyes of the lovely Margeau Lafite!” He cried as he grabbed Ms. Lafite and pulled her close to him.

She deftly twisted his arm back, elbowed him in the stomach, and grabbed the corkscrew from his hand. Le Cork twisted in pain.

“Giovanni was right” exclaimed Nicoletta – “she is efficient – and fantastic!!”

“She is also an undercover police operative who has been placed here to try to infiltrate le Cork’s organization” “thanks to your husband’s snooping, this case came to a conclusion faster than we imagined”

John Valleau lamented as le Cork was taken away in handcuffs. “With passion like that he would have made a great GREEN PARTY Protester, do you think he will be released any time soon Sgt. Cuff?”

“That depends on the recovery of Professor Ciccotti...”, said Cuff.

Giovanni indeed made a full recovery. Still in his hospital bed, he hears the knock of his dearest friend Ray. “I think you are well enough for a little celebration – old friend” says Ray to Giovanni. At that, Ray removes the bottle of Chateau Mouton Rothschild from his bag, uncorks it, “pop”, and with a flourish pours Giovanni and himself generous glasses.

“This is more wonderful than I ever imagined” says Ray sipping the wine.

“Indeed, it is like a cherished old friendship, warm and soothing”, says a very contented Giovanni.

The end.