

Excerpt from *Savor*:

The outdoor bandstand and vine-covered arbor area were fairly new to Fredrickson's. So new that the vines weren't much of a cover yet, but in another year or two would make great shade for those who wanted to get out of the sun. Live entertainment had been one of Margaret's ideas and so far was attracting busy weekend crowds. They had to tear down a couple of old dilapidated sheds, build the bandstand, plant sod, and add some fun sculptures to the mix, but this investment seemed to be well worth it.

The weekend had sort of snuck up on Billie since she'd been spending so much time with Handel the last few days. But when cars began rolling in late Saturday morning, he pushed her out the door and told her to go and supervise the winery so he could have a break. He said it with a smile but she knew she was getting on his nerves.

People were already spreading blankets on the grass and settling down to listen to jazz with a bottle of Fredrickson's in hand when Billie skirted the parking lot. Seeing a familiar neighbor she'd rather avoid, she made a detour of the front entrance of the winery and snuck through the trees to a side door that opened onto the pressing floor.

Digging in the pocket of her khaki shorts for the keys, she glanced back and saw the same neighbor following. Obviously, she'd been spotted. She released a sigh and pasted on a bright smile. "Good morning, Hazel. What can I do for you?" she asked, knowing she'd regret the question but feeling compelled to make it.

Hazel Thompson had lived next door to Fredrickson's since the 1960s. She and her husband owned eighteen acres of land, planted with Cabernet Sauvignon. These grapes made some of the finest red Bordeaux in the area. Last year they'd decided to retire from winemaking and sell their grapes to the highest bidder. In spite of Billie's best offer, their crop went to some retired Hollywood director turned entrepreneur. He'd bought a small Napa winery and was pouring millions into turning it into the next Disneyland – only with wine instead of rides. More competition for Fredrickson's.

The woman wore bright pink capris and a lacy, cream-colored tank top. Her long hair, dyed to the shade of a raven's wing, was twisted into a chignon at the back of her head. She was a thin woman, to the point of emaciation, obviously believing the fable, *you can never be too rich or too thin*. Reading glasses hung from a chain around her neck and swung back and forth against unnaturally perky aged breasts as she hurried along.

"For starters, you can tell me what is going on around here?" She planted her stiletto heels in the soft ground, long-nailed claws on bony hips. "This was a gun-free zone before you showed up and took over for Jack, but Monday night was the second time I've heard gunfire coming from your place. The first time resulted in death. What pray tell was the result this time?"

Billie tried to keep from smiling, but she had to look away when she noticed the brand new hummingbird tattoo on the old lady's ankle. She pretended to be interested in a stack of crates beside the door. "I'm sorry if it worried you, Hazel, but thankfully no one was killed," she said, straightening the stack. She wondered what took the woman so long to come and complain.

"When I saw police lights flashing across the vineyard I said to Herbie, 'I wonder if she's been shot? That husband of hers is the son of that horrible Sean Peterson after all.' He didn't try to kill you, did he?" she asked, with just a touch of gleeful hope in her eyes.

"No, Hazel. You do know my husband just got out of the hospital Monday. He was in a coma for a week. I don't think he's quite up to murder yet. Maybe after he's recuperated a bit."