

Noble Rot



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From Publishers Weekly Harriss, who won an Edgar Award for *The Bay Psalm Book Murder*, has given his third mystery the perfect title and metaphor for its breezy narrative about shady doings in California's Napa Valley. Just as the benign fungus *Botrytis cinerea* ("noble rot") invades the grapes of Chateau Letessier, so deception, sabotage and revenge infest the vineyard's tenants and neighbors. Bankrupt bon vivant Vinnie Letessier returns to his Uncle Francis's troubled business, only to find a corpse in the cabernet sauvignon fermentation tank; shortly thereafter, Francis dies in a suspicious car fire. Among the suspects pursued by Vinnie and Det. Holly Shelton: his uncle's money-grubbing ex-wife Adrienne; her paramour George Preston, formerly the Chateau's resident manager; Francis's niece Delphine and her husband, Bert Craven, who stand to inherit if Vinnie dies; and Andy Lacroix, a shady member

of the Napa Valley Board of Supervisors. Holly and Vinnie have romantic interludes with, respectively, the Chateau's foreman and a custom-tile designer, then uncover a land-development scheme that involves a local loan officer and a Bible-thumping gas station attendant. Most readers will be entertained by the book's effervescent banter, clever clues and ingenious modus operandi. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus Reviews In Harriss's third (Timor Mortis, 1986; The Bay Psalm Book Murder, 1983), Vinnie Letessier, after playing his way through college and an inherited fortune, finds refuge with his uncle Francis, beleaguered owner of a winery in Napa Valley. Vinnie sets about learning the business, which suffers another setback when a body is found in the fermentation tank--probably the work of Triskelion, a sinister company that covets the winery's land for a mega-resort complex. Homicide detective Holly Shelton is investigating when things turn really nasty with the murder of Uncle Francis. Vinnie manages to pull the business together, fall in love with ceramic artist Peggy Singletary, and look into some possible candidates for his uncle's killing--such as Francis's ex-wife Adrienne, now living with the winery's ex-manager George Preston; and politician Andrew Lacroix, with a shady European past and a girlfriend who was no friend to Francis. There are other suspects, and Vinnie eventually fumbles his way to the right one--with Detective Shelton just a step behind him. Never gripping but affable, with a chuckle or two. Add a plus for wine buffs. -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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