

The Blood Like Wine

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He stood by my hotel bed yesterday.

In the cool artificiality of a twenty-first-century hotel suite, with the curtains shut tight against the harsh light of day, beside the massive, white wardrobe, Francois stood.

He wore his best suit of blue silk—long jacket edged with lace, and tight knee-length breeches that molded his tall, muscular body. His golden curls fell to his shoulders, and his dark violet eyes were oh so infinitely sad.

He walked to the bed and opened his lace collar with a gloved finger, revealing the red line where the guillotine had separated his head from his body.

And he said nothing. Nothing. And yet, I knew all too well what he meant.

He vanished when I sat up. He always vanished. Like cherished smoke, like unreachable paradise, like longed-for death.

I sat beside the small desk and smoked my mint-laced cigarettes till sunset turned the world outside as dark as my hotel room.

Then I'd showered, dressed in my fuck-me-red dress, which went with my fuck-me-red painted nails, and with my blood red high heels, pulled back my straight, golden hair, got into my black sports car and hit the road.

I'd made contact. I had the address. I would do what Francois wanted.

I always did what Francois wanted. It was all I had left.

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We'd met when we were both seventeen. Which is not to say we were the same age. Born in Faubourg Saint-Antoine, where rats outnumbered people ten to one, where the streets were so narrow and the houses on either side so high that the sun never touched the shit-layered streets, I'd had no time for childhood.

But I was one of the lucky ones: I'd survived.

By twelve, I was an orphan. My mother died giving birth to me. My father, a poor cobbler, died of desperation and tiredness in 1786.

I didn't know the date then, but I know it now. I didn't know how to read then, but I know it now.

Look at the gifts death has heaped upon me.

They said that my father died of a fever. All were fevers, then, and it might have been anything at all: a cold, an un-healed sore, tuberculosis or cancer. All of it then was .a fever—stinking sweat upon the dirty bedsheets, a struggling voice, breathing that sank slowly, slowly, into a harsh rasp at the throat. Then nothing.

The neighbor women had looked after my father in his last days, community being the only palliative for the harsh, grinding poverty of peasant France.

Just before the end, I was admitted to the small, dim room at the back of the house and allowed near the dank little pile of bedding, where my father lay.

His grey hair had grown all white through his illness, and his face had sunken, the skin drying and stretching, till it looked like parchment layered over the skull. His aquiline nose looked sharper, and his dark brown eyes smaller, opaque, lost amid the yellow skin, the white hair, the sharp nose.

He smiled and it was the smile of a skull, his irregular teeth gaping at me as I approached.

The hand that stretched out of the pile of covers and grasped my small, soft hand looked more like a claw, with long, yellowed nails. And there was the smell of death in the breath that flew past my face as my father spoke..

“Sylvie,” he said. His eyes were soft, sadly sweet when he looked at me. “Sylvie, my daughter, you are too beautiful. Marry someone soon. Marry one of our neighbors. Don’t let your beauty lure you outside your sphere. That beauty can be a curse.”

Uncomprehending, I listened. Uncomprehending, I held his hand.

Though girls little older than I were often married, I had no thought for such a thing. As for leaving the neighborhood, I dreamt about it every day and every night and prayed upon it to any listening divinity as I told the beads of my rosary with the other women at my father’s wake.

I knew I was beautiful and looked older than I was. I’d often seen the effect of that beauty in the lingering glance of passing coachmen, in the appreciative look of merchants *in* the weekly market.

I dreamt of leaving behind the small, dark streets, the smell of stale smoke and shit, the memory of my father’s rasping breath sinking lower and lower into nothing.

He was thirty-two when he died. I had no intention of dying young.

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Leaving the hotel parking lot, I drove away into darkness.

In the eastern United States, where I had lived for a time, as the sun went down other lights came up: neon lights of gas stations and drive-throughs, lights that shone on billboards, lights of hotels and motels and restaurants. All of them shone from the side of the road, turning the night into a continuous sunset and reminding me of what I could no longer experience.

But out west the sun went down and night came on, like a blanket obliterating all life, all reminders of life.

Driving at night, between Denver and the little town of Goldport nestled up against the Rockies, I saw no light.

No reminders of lost dawns moved me; no memories of past noons disturbed me. No sharp, aching mementos of Francois’s golden hair glimmering in the sunlight.

There was nothing in the world, nothing, except the shiny black highway unrolling in the headlights of my black sports car like a lazy snake, and the loud music drowning out my thoughts.

Here and there, clusters of distant, twinkling lights looked like stars fallen to Earth, like a Christmas tree

in a cemetery.

I lit a cigarette from the end of the other, threw the spent butt out the window, my nails flourishing briefly in my field of vision, looking like claws dipped into fresh blood.

Smoke enough of these and they would kill you. That's what the surgeon general said. But his promises failed me.

What would he know? I'd died in November 1793, when terror reigned on the streets of Paris and blood flowed like wine over the stained boards of Madame la Guillotine.

My face in the mirror looked back at me, triangular, small, pink. Too pale. My grey eyes showed dark circles all around, the circles of those who hadn't slept for too long. The circles of the damned.

I looked twenty, as I had over two centuries ago. Twenty and still as pretty, still as slim, still as delectable as I'd been when the revolution had washed over Paris like a madness and drowned me in its waves.

Then, as now, my beauty bought luxuries: travel and fine clothes, a beautiful house, transportation.

But transportation now was a sleek new Viper, a horseless carriage that sped silently through the night, devouring the never-ending snaking road, and yet still incapable of taking me away from my guilt, from my fear, away from Francois's accusing violet eyes, his eyes that found me every time.

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I caught Francois as one caught a fever. And fevers in those days came at a galloping speed, carried by the impetuous horses of madness.

At seventeen, I had left my miserable origins far behind.

I was beautiful, admired, the mistress of a member of the representative assembly, the hostess of a fashionable philosophical salon.

I'd clawed my way out of Faubourg Saint-Antoine, climbing over the backs of rejected lovers, over the proffered purses of eager new ones.

In my salon, with its satin-covered walls, its velvet-covered couches, gathered the fine flower of thinkers in France.

Not the fire-breathing revolutionaries, not the scabby sans culottes.

No. To my nightly assemblies came younger sons of nobility, well-dressed young lawyers, the heirs to bourgeois purses.

Their arguments spoke of Arcadia, of the natural man, the noble savage that never existed anywhere but in the dreams of well-brought-up men.

And I, little Sylvie, who still didn't know how to read and knew scant of anything else, listened to their arguments, never letting them guess my ignorance, never telling them that uneducated men were not near to angels and that nature was very far from nurture.

I sat and listened, and was bored, and dared not talk truthfully to any of them—not even my patron, who paid the bills for my fashionable town house, my fashionable wardrobe, my carriage and my maid. None of them knew about the dark, dank house of my upbringing, or of the sound of rats, rustling close to the walls, or of my father in his deathbed, with the smell of death and sweat, and his rasping breath, and his

unheeded advice.

And then there had been Francois.

He'd appeared at the salon one night, brought by someone whose name I don't remember, as I no longer remember the names of my many patrons.

But him I'd never have forgotten, even had our destinies not entwined in blood and guilt.

Francois was tall and so pale that the light of candles shone on his skin with the subdued richness of fine silk. His features were finely chiseled, just one square chin, one sharp nose short of effeminate.

His fine golden curls spilled like molten metal to his waist and highlighted the squareness of his shoulders, the narrowness of his waist, the masculine beauty of his long, muscular legs.

He walked like angels must walk in paradise—with effortless grace, like a dancer who has forgotten steps and yet moves to the sound of unheard music.

Francois, someone told me his name was. Francis. He was the son of the marquis of something or other.

I never had a good ear for noble names. But I had a good eye for a well-cut manly figure. And I had learned the persuasive words, the easy laughter, the fan carelessly waved towards him so as to give him a scent of my perfume, the tilting forward that allowed him sight of the deep crevice between my round, silk-cradled breasts, the laying of a well-manicured, soft hand on his arm.

By the end of the night, sweet Francois was mine.

I drove out of the highway at the exit for Goldport, a small mining town that time had forgotten, nestled amid the Rockies.

Closed mines had given way to casinos and to motels and hotels of all descriptions.

The town itself looked like a splash of neon amid the dark mountains. I fished for my sunglasses from the passenger seat, and put them on, to mitigate the glare to my dark-loving eyes.

The Good Rest Motel consisted of several rectangular buildings, painted gingivitis-pink, nestling amid improbably tall pines at the entrance to the town.

I took a right by the lighted billboard that advertised king-size beds and a TV in every room, and parked next to the RVs and trucks beneath the trees.

Cabin number twelve was dark, but the sounds of the television came from it.

At my knock, invisible hands opened the door, with the classical unoled-hinge shriek of every B-grade horror movie.

And, from the darkness within, a voice spoke; a voice said, "Ah, Sylvie. Beautiful Sylvie. Still as pretty, I see."

I blinked. Pierre, with his dark eyes, his curly black hair still long enough to sweep his shoulders, stood in the shadows.

The shadows were bright as light to me.

And Pierre smiled at me, the smile of the damned. He wore a white suit, a strange choice for a vampire.

I closed the door behind me. The small room smelled of that dry dust of long-forgotten tombs. It smelled of Pierre.

But, behind that smell, I could sense another. The smell of blood, the smell of some living thing that Pierre had fed upon tonight.

That blood, coursing fast in Pierre's long-dead veins, made me lick my lips, made my heart quicken within my withered chest.

Pierre stepped back and smiled, his old, evasive smile. "You said you wished to see me, Sylvie? What did you want?"

"His name is Pierre D'Laubergine," Francois said.

Francois was twenty—had just turned twenty. The last three years hadn't been easy for us—for either of us.

I'd kept my home, but my patron and protection had vanished in the maelstrom of the revolution.

Francois had taken his place for a while, but then even he had lost the power to support me. His lands were confiscated, his money fast vanishing. He had secured us two small rooms in a middle-class town house. A far step down from my little town house where I'd held my salon for the luminaries of the more restrained forms of revolution. But well above Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

Lying naked and perfect in my bed, Francois looked unscathed by three years of living beneath his station, if above his means.

The suit folded over the foot of my bed was serviceable muslin, in a greyish color. Not black, since black was assumed to mean one was an aristo, mourning for the king whom the revolution had guillotined two years ago.

But Francois's body was still pure white silk, stretched evenly over a muscular frame that would have suited a workman well enough. Only no workman had ever grown like this, tall and straight, not deformed. Workmen's bodies soon became twisted by work and bent out of their intended shape.

Francois was all that could be intended: soft skin and violet eyes; elegant, tall body and golden hair; a smell of mint; a lingering taste of fresh apples.

He turned in bed as he spoke and looked intently at me, his square-tipped finger drawing a circle around my dark nipple. "Pierre D'Laubergine is his name, as I said, and he's a guard of the city. He said he could get us passports out of the city, out of the country. We could get as far as Calais, and from there hire a boat to England. There are still boats. For a price."

"What... What would the price be?" I asked. I knew he didn't have much, though he'd never tell me exactly how much remained of his once-vast fortune. His father had been imprisoned, executed, and the family lands confiscated.

Yet, Francois paid for our lodging and for our food; but how long would he still have the money?

His broad, sensuous lips twisted in a wry smile. This wry smile was a gift of the revolution, something the pampered innocent of three years ago would have been incapable of. "Too much money, *ma petite*. Too much."

He pulled me to him. His taut neck tasted of fresh apples and smelled of pure mint. I buried my face in his

hair. I savored the touch of his silky hands.

I loved Francois. But how could we afford to escape the revolution? And, already reduced to middle-class circumstances, how would we live when we got to England?

I didn't have the courage to ask.

I bent my head to his golden hair; I inhaled his scent of mint and freshly cut apples. I wanted to know nothing more.

Pierre backed away from me, smiling still.

His dark eyes looked at me with sheer, blank incomprehension.

"What do you want, Sylvie?" he asked. "You said you had news... about the slayer?"

For just a moment, his eyes looked unfocused, his gaze tinged with fear.

The slayer. That was what we all called the mysterious figure who killed vampires. News traveled fast, nervously, through the vampire network. People who don't die easy, people who don't age all get to know each other over time. There weren't that many of us. Growing fewer by the day.

The slayer. Like someone out of medieval legend, a creature of right, slaying the evil ones, laying the undead to rest.

Only we weren't medieval vampires. We were Enlightenment vampires, born at the dawn of science, grown strong with it, harbored in its shade.

Science made people disbelieve things that went bump in the night. Science ensured that no one searched for us, much less slew us.

And now this creature traveled, as silently, as darkly as one of us, traveled swiftly around the world, slaying vampires.

I smiled at Pierre, "I do know about the slayer," I said. I smiled at him. I batted my eyelashes. Long, long ago I'd learned that what worked on mortal men worked on vampires, too. They might be dead men, but not where it mattered.

I walked forward, just little me, little Sylvie, tottering atop my high heels. I smiled my most innocent smile, and I stepped up, walked close. I leaned on Pierre, feeling his thick, muscular arm beneath my hand, and leaning in to kiss his black-stubbled chin. "It's been so long," I said. "Since I've been with one of my own kind. So long."

He looked down. He chuckled. Only the slightest bit of weariness remained in his dark eyes. "The slayer?" he prompted.

I reached for the black bow tie that provided the only contrasting note in his snow-white outfit.

My fingers brushed against the crisp, cool collar of his white shirt. His tie felt like satin. He smelled dusty and clean like the grave, but with the underlying spiciness of freshly drawn blood.

The recent feeding put color in his cheeks and a quick glimmer in his eye.

As if he were alive.

“Can we talk about it later?” I asked, pulling his bow tie free and unbuttoning the top button of his crisp shirt, and raining little, soft kisses at the base of his neck that, even two centuries later, remained golden tan. “It’s been so long.”

He sighed, then chuckled, a chuckle that was almost a giggle. His large hands engulfed my small waist. “Ah, Sylvie. Always the same. Dead or alive, Sylvie will be a fun girl.”

Pierre was an officer in the city police—tanned dark, with black curls that brushed the shoulders of his white suit. Like most city police, he lacked a uniform and wore what he pleased. In Pierre’s case, that was white satin, as cool and glimmering as new snow.

I remembered staring at his attire—the well-cut breeches, the loose, expensive shirt, and thinking that he couldn’t possibly—he couldn’t ever afford such clothes from his low-paying job. And I wondered again how much Francois was paying Pierre. And how much would be left for us. But I didn’t dare ask until we were in the carriage.

Both of us wore dark, peasant clothes of prickly wool, clothes that reminded me of the shabby skirt and shirt I’d worn as a child. They were secondhand clothes and I could smell in them the mustiness of cramped corridors, of rancid smoke, of insufficient air.

Just putting the clothes on, I’d felt as though I were suffocating.

Now, in the narrow carriage, tossed shoulder to shoulder with Francois, with his arm around me, his hair tied back and hid beneath a liberty cap, I felt as though the last five years had been erased. I heard my father’s voice telling me to many a neighbor, consigning that neighbor and me to the same life of poverty that had killed my mother, that had killed him.

“You’re very quiet, *ma petite*” Francis said. His arm over my shoulders brought almost stifling heat, and a feeling of confinement. He smelled of dirty wool and the acid sweat of fear.

I’d loved Francis for three years, and now he felt like a stranger in my arms.

“I was thinking,” I said. “I was thinking.” The carriage carrying us moved through the night, rocking on its unsteady, ancient wheels.

The curtains were drawn, all was dark. I could see Francois only because his skin was so white, his hair so golden.

He pulled at a strand of my own hair that peeked out from beneath my own liberty cap. “Thinking of what, Sylvie?”

“Of how we’ll live in England. You have property there, yes?” I had a vague idea that almost all noblemen had property in both countries.

But Francois chuckled and shook his head. “No, my little one. No property at all. We’ll live as God shall want. I know how to read and write, and have other small gifts. Something will offer.”

The carriage trembled on and on, upon its unsteady wheels, along a rutted road. “No property at all?” I asked. “No family?”

Francois looked baffled, as though not understanding my question. He shrugged. “God will provide.”

Oh, easy for him to think that. The son of a nobleman, raised in a palace. When had he known hunger—the sort of hunger that twisted your stomach at night, while you lay in the dark and listened to

the rats run within the wall? When?

God didn't provide for most of us. For those without family, without connections, without property.

"We'll get married," Francois said. "I'll look after you."

There was only one thing I knew how to do, only one way of acquiring power, and that didn't involve—didn't allow for—my being a married woman. I looked at Francois, wondering if he would play along. But he wouldn't. I could never have Francois while living off other men.

Francois was too fine for that. Too idealistic. He believed God would provide.

He tightened his arm around me, in a thick smell of heated wool. "We'll be all right, Sylvie. We have each other."

Each other and nothing more. Together we could starve in the English equivalent of Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

I felt trapped, but I had nowhere to run.

Without Francois, I could remain in France and find someone else to support me—one of the new republican elite, perhaps, a rich bourgeois.

But I wouldn't have Francois.

And the thought of his body, his perfect, white, silken body in another's arms made my heart clench in jealous possessiveness.

"Of what are you thinking, little one?" Francois asked.

The carriage stopped, with a rocking halt, and our coachman, paid for by Pierre, yelled something.

It was much too early to have got to Calais.

Francois stood up, startled, as the door opened and a light shone in on us.

"Were you thinking of this, all along?" Pierre asked. "Did you have this in mind when you summoned me?"

I didn't answer. I covered his mouth with my eager one. "It's been too long," I said. "Too long since I've had you."

I tore off his clothes, frantically, and pushed him towards the low bed. The television still blared on, behind us, as I kissed his naked body.

The smell of fresh blood in his veins drove me on.

The light of a lantern blinded us, while voices yelled, "Aristo, aristo." Aristocrat. The death sentence. On such a word had people been hanged from lampposts, trampled by the crowd, bayoneted to death.

Trembling I rose, trembling I clung to Francois.

Francois blinked in surprise. He looked only slightly pale. "You are mistaken," he said, trying to infuse his well-bred voice with a popular patois that wouldn't have fooled a child. "You are mistaken. This is just me, Francois Ville, a farmer, and my wife, Sylvie."

But the crowd laid rough hands on us; the crowd pulled us out. Someone stood before us, someone wearing a patched-together uniform. He had the look of one in authority and he turned to the man all in white, beside him, and said, "Are these the ones, Pierre? Is this the little marquis and his fiancée?"

I realized then we had been betrayed. Francois's money, all that remained of his fortune, wouldn't even buy us slow death in an English slum. Only quick death in the guillotine.

This wasn't right. It wasn't proper. Francois was an aristo, born and bred, one of those for whom God provided.

But I had already paid my dues in sweat and blood, in tears and humiliation. I'd grown up in Faubourg Saint-Antoine. "I'm not his fiancée," I yelled, as years of cultivating my accent fell from my voice, leaving the gutter-snipe speech that had been my first expression. "I'm a prostitute. I was sent by this man, Pierre, to entrap the *si-devant* marquis."

The man in authority looked at Pierre as I detached myself from Francois to embrace Pierre.

For a moment it hung in the balance, as I frantically kissed Pierre and thrust my tongue in his mouth. Then he laughed and said, "Yes, she's a prostitute."

I hardly dared turn, to see Francois as they pulled him away. He turned back to look at me, and his violet eyes showed a mix of dread and grief. They sparkled with tears like violets under the rain.

"Do you ever dream of him?" I asked Pierre.

"Of whom?" Pierre looked blankly at me. Funny how even vampires, after lovemaking, looked slack and stupid and slow. He lay on the rumpled bed. A ray of moonlight came through the window and shone on him, stripping him of his tan, making his skin look even whiter than normal vampire skin. Like the belly of a fish, dead and repulsive, pulled from the depths of a sea and left to rot on the beach.

Of whom. He didn't even remember. I'd lived with Pierre for a year, after Francois's death. But surely, he would remember how we'd got together. Wouldn't he?

"Francois," I said. "My little marquis."

I got my purse that I'd abandoned in the beaten-down armchair, and, by the light of the silver screen, got a cigarette and my lighter, and lit the cigarette.

Pierre looked blank for a moment; then a spark of intelligence shone in his eyes. "Francois? No. I had quite forgotten."

I'd gone to see Francois guillotined. I couldn't stay away.

I had to be there when the one man I loved coughed in the basket, in the droll language of the times for the sound a severed head made, in the basket with other heads, while dying.

Unlike so many prisoners, Francois hadn't aged, in his three months in jail. Instead he seemed to have matured. His beauty cloaked itself in a terrible dignity, the dignity of an emperor or of a god, of a supernatural being that no mere human could touch. He had procured, somehow, his best suit of blue satin, and it was what he wore to the guillotine.

Before putting his neck on the terrible rest from which no one rose alive, he tied back his hair, dignifiedly, slowly, ensuring that his neck was free for the blow.

The Place de la Concorde was full of men and women yelling and shrieking for the aristo's blood. Men and women who'd never known Francois and had no mercy on his tender, silk like skin, his soft sensuous lips, his violet eyes. They could not see his nobility, his terrible, brittle majesty. But I could.

And, at the last moment, before laying his head on the block, his gaze found me amid the crowd, and his lips formed the one word, *Sylvie*.

Then the blade fell, and his blood flowed like wine. So much blood, washing down the blade, the indifferent boards of the guillotine.

And Francis's head tumbled into the basket, amid the others. What was done could no longer be undone. My love had died hating me.

In the twentieth century, research found that a severed head could live as much as five minutes after beheading.

Had Francois lived that long? What had he thought?

And why did his vengeance still visit me?

That night, after his death, I dreamed of him. He came into my dream as he had been in life—whole and unharmed, save for a red line that showed where his head had been severed from the body.

He'd come, step by step, silently, to the bed I shared with Pierre, and stood by it, and smiled at me, a smile all the more ghastly for being gentle and soft.

His gloved finger had opened the lace of his collar to show his red wound. He touched it with his finger, and it bled, a trickle dripping down the front of his shirt.

"Drink," he told me. "Drink. You have become one of them. One who feeds on human need and suffering. You should have their rewards."

"Francois?" I'd asked. "Francois, but you're dead."

He grinned, a grin as gentle and as innocent as the one I'd first seen on him, but looking ghastly and wan on that pale face. "No, my dear. I'll live as long as injustice must be avenged. And so will you. Drink, my dear," he said, and pointed at his dripping wound. "You'll live forever."

To live forever. Not to die like my father, young and miserable.

I drank. It tasted like new wine, like newly stomped grapes, fermented and ripened and full of sugar and heady alcohol.

When I leaned back, satiated, Francois smiled at me. "Now you've become like them," he said. "Like everyone who commits great injustice, who feeds on the suffering of others. The worst of them do not die, you know? They become vampires, who hunt the night, feeding still on blood and suffering. And now you're one of them, my Sylvie, and you have what you want. You'll be forever young, forever beautiful."

Pierre slept, in the sliver of moonlight, looking grey and wan like a landed fish.

I crept close to him. I snuggled against his chest. He smiled, his teeth glimmering in the moonlight.

Fresh blood sang through his veins, pumped through his long-dead heart, put a flush on his cheeks.

Years later I figured out I'd died that night, when Francois first visited me. Perhaps it was the fright of

seeing his ghost. Perhaps remorse. Perhaps thwarted love and realizing I'd never get to hold Francois in my arms again.

The symptoms had come on, little by little, over the next couple of years: the fear of light, the abhorrence of food, the need to suck fresh blood from human victims.

The latter hadn't been really difficult. I was still young, still beautiful. Any man would go with me into a dark alley, into a shady bar.

Five years later, I'd heard through the vampire circuit that Pierre D'Laubergine had been shot in battle as one of Napoleon's soldiers, and got up twelve hours later, and washed away the stink of the battleground, and become one of us.

When I was sure that Pierre was asleep, I nuzzled close to his neck. I found the pulsing vein of life.

I sank my fangs in so quietly, he never knew as I drained all the blood out of him, not leaving a drop that would sustain his life in death.

Vampires won't die from being drained, but it will make them unconscious for twelve hours—long enough for the sun to come in through the curtains I left wide open and reduce Pierre to what he smelled of: clean graveyard dust, with no life, no memory, finally washed of all guilt.

Last night Francois came to me, in my hotel room.

He looked as always, terribly near and impossibly far away, gratified but sad, terribly sad.

His violet eyes looked at me, as always, with a mixture of desire and revulsion.

I stared back with a clear vision.

Francois said I would have to do this while there were vampires left in the world, while there were those who lived from others' blood.

I was his vengeance, loosed on malefactors.

When I killed the last of them, I knew, I would finally be able to clutch his insubstantial body of smoke and fog in my trembling arms. I'd feel his silky skin once more, I'd savor his fresh apple taste, I'd smell his fresh mint smell.

I would step with him through the archways of life, into restful, serene death.

But then, Francois had said, I would live forever.

There would always be evil men to kill. And Francois would be forever out of reach.

I got out of bed, and lit a mint cigarette, and looked at the place where I'd glimpsed Francois, by the big white wardrobe.

To live forever had once seemed so sweet. How quickly it had grown weary. How quickly did I, like a child at the end of a long and fretful day, come to long for rest.

My task is impossible, and yet I must do it.

I have beauty and youth and life eternal. But death is the only gift within my giving.