



WINTER EVENING

What a wonderful evening it had been.

I could still smell her perfume. If I slowly ran my tongue over my lips, I could still taste her. Deep red is my favourite colour, she didn't disappoint. Leaning back in the upholstered armchair, I let out a sigh, perfection. Carefully taking the tobacco from the tin, I laid it into the bulb of my pipe, like a thrush lining its nest.

The match struck against the box and the flame burst into life, I gently drew on the pipe, pouring myself a brandy. With the fire crackling in the hearth and the green drapes drawn tightly against the hard January frost, I waited for the tobacco and alcohol hit. The heat of the brandy caught the back of my throat and I coughed. This was no Courvoisier, disappointing, it needed an accompaniment, a strong espresso maybe? In the cold kitchen, I stroked the delicate china cup, as smooth as skin, bought as one of a pair in an antique shop, the perfect size for a few mouthfuls of the syrupy hot liquid. I brewed the coffee, trying to ignore the mess after the leisurely meal. I would clear up in the morning.

Returning to the warmth of the lounge, I poured another brandy, and settled back into the armchair. As I inhaled the Golden Harvest tobacco, the smoke clouds rose up to the ceiling and a rolling grey mist collected in the corners of the room. I must have fallen asleep.

I awoke to the shrill ring of the telephone, I shuddered at the sight of the dead fire, grey and cold, like the winter morning creeping through the curtains, the empty Chianti and brandy bottles staring accusingly at me.

As I walked past the kitchen door I caught sight of Sally's copper hair, lying in a puddle on the kitchen floor. Deep red is my favourite colour.

Lifting the receiver, I cleared my throat, "Hello."

"Hello, Dr Lecter, it's Joe from the police department, we have another missing person, Ms Sally Moncrieff, a red head again."

I nodded.