"THE ISLAND"

by EvilAdmin

Summary

A ‘Most Dangerous Game’ AU with an ABO and cannibalistic twist.

The year is 1927 and Will Graham is a male omega masquerading as a beta so he can live a semi-normal life in a time where male omegas are rare and thought of as unnatural. He’s thrilled when he lands a job on a luxury liner, but then fate takes a cruel turn when the ship sinks. He survives with another young passenger, Abigail Hobbs, and it seems like a miracle when there’s an island nearby where a Count and his nephew and two servants live. But as Will discovers, there are survivors from a previous wreck staying with the Count, and as suspicions grow Will has to ask himself, why would the Count and his nephew choose to live all alone on an island?
January 1, 1927, 12:30 a.m.

Will Graham made his way around the ship’s elegant dining room with an open bottle of champagne refilling empty glasses. The New Year’s celebration aboard the luxury liner Aperitif was in full swing, and he doubted he would be seeing his bunk for at least another two hours. The thick smoke in the air from the fat Cuban cigars the men were smoking was making Will’s eyes water, but on the bright side there was a band playing lively music and a female singer who had quite a lovely voice, so he was enjoying the music and watching couples dancing. Will noticed the dancing was getting livelier in direct correlation to the amount of champagne being consumed, and he smiled as he watched Charles DuPont’s daughter get up on one of the tables and start doing a very spirited Charleston while her father blustered and tried to get her down. Will chuckled as he continued making the rounds and refilling glasses.

Despite being tired from the long day and dealing with the rude manner common among the upper echelon, he was feeling positive about the upcoming new year. He had been extremely fortunate to get this job six months ago when another crew member died suddenly of an unfortunate fever. Since attaining this post he had been saving his money diligently so he could buy his own fishing boat. It was his dream to start his own small business supplying fresh seafood to local shops and restaurants in his home town of Baton Rouge and to become completely independent and answer to no one. His current job didn’t actually pay a lot, but it made up for it by providing free lodgings and meals. By not having to pay for housing and food he could put nearly all his earnings away towards the boat. By his estimate he had about a fifth of the money he needed already saved up, and in two more years he should be able to buy a boat that he had already picked out.

“Boy! Hey, you there, boy!”

Will sighed. Mr. Hobbs was calling him over again. The upper class in general were snobs and looked down on him, but the Hobbs’ were new money, having found oil on their property only two years ago, so Mr. and Mrs. Hobbs apparently felt the need to overcompensate by acting extra snobbish. Will couldn’t help but notice that the old money families actively avoided them despite Mr. and Mrs. Hobbs’ numerous attempts to engage them in conversation. Will braced himself as he went over to refill Mr. Hobbs’ glass yet again. Mr. Hobbs had been partaking of the champagne rather enthusiastically.

“About time!” Mr. Hobbs said, clearly tipsy, while Will refilled his glass.

“My apologies, sir,” Will said while glancing over at the Hobbs’ daughter, Abigail, who was blushing and giving him an apologetic look. Clearly she was embarrassed by her father’s behavior.
“Can I get you anything else, Miss Abigail?” he asked walking over to her and giving her a small smile. “Perhaps a sarsaparilla or some lemonade?”

“No, thank you.” Lowering her voice she said, “I just want to get out of here and go back to my cabin and get some sleep, but mother thinks I’m going to meet some rich young alpha with a good name on this cruise who is going to fall madly in love with me and propose on the spot, so she won’t let me leave lest I miss an opportunity,” she whispered conspiratorially with a wry expression.

“Well, you look lovely tonight, Miss,” he said, noting her sleeveless peach crepe gown with gold beading on the bodice and gold fringe beading dangling from the hem. Her hair was pulled back into an elegant chignon and she was wearing drop earrings made with similar beading to match. Will thought she put all the other over-dressed women to shame with her simplistic beauty. “Any of these young lads who don’t fall madly in love with you are clearly buffoons and not worthy of your time,” he whispered, and was delighted when she giggled and blushed. He had liked the 18-year-old omega from the moment the girl had come on board. She was always kind and down to earth. He could tell she hated all this dressing up and putting on of airs.

Mr. Hobbs cleared his throat loudly. “Don’t you have something else you could be doing other than bothering my daughter?” he said a bit loudly, a fat cigar clamped between his teeth.

“Of course, sir,” Will said blushing, giving Abigail a last little smile before walking off.

Will saw the Vandersmyth family get up and head toward the exit and felt hopeful that the others would follow their lead. The wealthy were a bit like sheep in that when one did something, the others followed their lead. Yes, that seemed to be the signal, because the Astors and the Rothschilds were getting up now as well.

Will pulled at his stiff celluloid collar. The climate was warmer in this part of the world and it tended to get stuffy below deck with this many people crowded together. He was starting to sweat underneath his black waiters uniform and white gloves and knew a few of his curls had sprung free from the heavy layer of pomade he applied to smooth his hair down into the accepted slicked back look all the stewards were required to wear

He put the champagne bottle back into the ice bucket to keep it chilled and picked up an empty tray and headed for the now empty tables to start clearing them off. Maybe he would be in his bunk sooner than he thought.

“Hey, you there, boy! More champagne!”

Or, maybe not. Will sighed as he went to retrieve the bottle of champagne.

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Jack Crawford, the captain of the Aperitif, stood on the bridge sipping coffee from a fine bone china cup and looking up at a sky that was as clear and full of stars as ever he had seen. He had shared a traditional midnight toast with the guests below deck in the dining room and departed quickly thereafter. He was now breathing deeply of the night air and appreciating the moderate 69 degree temperature. He smiled as he realized that if he were standing outside back home in the States he’d most likely be wearing a heavy overcoat and galoshes.

“Quite the sight, eh, sir?” his first mate said.

“It is indeed, Mister Brown.”
“Just wanted to let you know we’re approaching the Strait of Magellan, cap’n.”

“Do you see the marking lights showing the safe passage?” the captain asked, stepping back inside the bridge cabin and setting down his cup.

“Aye, sir. But the lights don't seem to be in just the right place. They're both a bit out of position, according to the chart.”

“Two light buoys mean a safe channel between the world over,” Captain Jack said, looking at the chart for himself.

“Well, let’s hope that’s the case or we’re in big trouble. As you can see on the chart, sir, the water shoals on the island side, while the deep soundings run to the mainland.”

“All right, just to be safe take her down to five knots, Mr. Brown, and steady as she goes right down the center. And send a couple boys up to the crow’s nest to keep a sharp eye out just in case.”

“Aye-aye, cap’n,” Mister Brown said.

Jack walked back outside and headed toward the bow. He could see the faint glow of the red marking lights on either side of the strait, but little else. There was a full moon out tonight and its reflection shimmered and danced on the water’s surface, making it hard to see anything else. He watched as a shooting star suddenly blazed across the sky and frowned. Shooting stars are known to signify that a change or big event is coming, a symbol of endings. Sailors are a superstitious bunch and Jack suddenly felt a cold trickle of dread go down his spine at the timing of the star. He went back to the bridge cabin and grabbed a pair of binoculars and then headed for the bow to help keep watch. He would feel much better once they were safely through the strait.

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Will was busy clearing off the empty tables. There were only two tables still occupied, one being the Hobbs’ family, and the other being Mr. and Mrs. Jones, another new money family, having discovered an untapped silver mine in Colorado. The Hobbs and Jones now seemed to be engaged in a lively conversation. Poor Abigail looked miserable and Will shook his head as it looked like the poor girl wasn’t getting to bed any earlier than he was.

He had just picked up a tray of empty champagne glasses when the ship jarred suddenly with a loud cracking sound, listing sharply to the right sending Will stumbling sideways and falling to the ground, the tray and glasses falling with a loud crash of metal and breaking glass. He sat up, stunned, as the ship groaned and came to a stop. His heart was hammering and he heard screams coming from all over the ship, including from the remaining guests in the dining room. He then heard the sharp blast of a whistle topside, which was the signal for everyone to get up on deck with undue haste. He stood up, having trouble walking with how the ship was tilted, and yelled, “Everyone up on deck—NOW!”

He ran over to Abigail and helped her up as she had fallen off her chair and was struggling to get up with her legs tangled in her gown. “What happened?” she asked, looking scared.

“We must have hit something, Miss. Hurry up and get topside. The captain will instruct everyone what to do,” he said, trying to sound confident despite his fear.

Abigail nodded, but then spotted her father, who was sprawled on the floor and appeared to be unconscious, a small trickle of blood at his temple.
“Dad!” she yelled, making her way toward him.

“Don’t worry about him,” Will said, grabbing her arm. “I’ll help him. Just help your mother and get topside quickly,” he said, pointing her in the direction of the stairs.

Abigail went and helped her mother, who was having difficulty walking in her fashionable high heeled buckled shoes.

Will looked for Mr. Jones, thinking he might help him with Mr. Hobbs, but he and his wife were already gone.

He knelt down and tapped Mr. Hobbs on the cheek. “You have to wake up now, sir. Please, sir, you need to get up,” he said, shaking him frantically as he felt the ship suddenly lurch further sideways.

Mr. Hobbs opened his bleary eyes. “What’re you doin’? Get your stinkin’ hands off me,” he said, pushing Will’s hands away.

“Please, sir, you have to get up and get up on deck. I believe the ship is sinking.”

Mr. Hobbs seemed to realize what was happening then and sobered up rather quickly, letting Will help him up. Will pulled one of Mr. Hobbs’s arms around his shoulders and helped him up the stairs leading to the deck. It was tough going as the ship was now leaning at a severe angle. Finally when they were on deck Will saw that it was utter pandemonium. The crew was trying to ready the lifeboats, but people were panicking and trying to get into the boats before they were ready.

Will spotted one member of the crew passing out life vests and went to get one for himself and one for Mr. Hobbs, but when he returned Mr. Hobbs was gone. He put his life vest on while wondering how he might help. Captain Jack was shouting through a megaphone, trying to maintain order, but people weren’t listening. The ship was sitting low in the water and Will knew that it must be taking on water fast, so it was inevitable that it was going to sink. They needed to get off the ship and gain a little distance before it went down and they were sucked down in the undertow.

Will watched as crew members tried to lower two lifeboats full of people into the water, but other people were climbing over the rail and jumping into the already crowded boats in total panic. The weight became too much for the crewmen to hold onto the ropes, which slipped through their hands, and Will watched as one lifeboat dropped nose first into the water, dumping all the people into the ocean. The other lifeboat managed to land properly, but then the people who were now in the water were grabbing onto the sides of it in a panic trying to get into an already crowded boat, and he watched in further dismay as the boat capsized. This was madness.

Will suddenly spotted Abigail halfway down the deck holding onto the rail and looking frightened as people pushed past her. It looked as if she had gotten separated from her mother. He ran over to her with the extra life vest he had.

“Put this on, Miss!” he yelled, over the screaming. He helped her put it on and tie the fastenings, and then all hell broke loose as there was an explosion as the cold salt water finally reached the superheated boilers. Will and Abigail were both hit with a hot blast as flames shot up the center of the broken ship, and they were thrown over the railing with the force of the blast.

Will was a strong swimmer, having grown up near the ocean, and he had a life vest on, so he wouldn’t normally be worried about drowning, but as he looked around there were people who
clearly couldn’t swim and who weren’t wearing life vests grabbing on to others and pulling them under. He spotted Abigail and quickly swam over to her. She looked stunned, her eyes large and luminous in the moonlight. As Will looked at the ship, which was lit up by the full moon and the flames shooting up out of her center, he could see people leaping over the side now in total panic. All around him people were in the water, many without lifejackets, screaming, struggling, grabbing onto each other and pulling them down to drown. This was a highly dangerous situation and he needed to get himself and Abigail away from both the ship and from the panicked people.

He spotted a large piece of wood nearby and grabbed hold of Abigail’s arm and swam them both toward it. Abigail was staying afloat thanks to the jacket, but he could tell she couldn’t swim, and especially not in that long dress. He helped get her on the wood, which looked to be a section of the boat blown loose in the blast roughly the size of a door; then grabbed hold of the side of it and began kicking as hard as he could away from the ship. When he felt he had gained some distance he stopped and looked back. The part of the ship that was above water was on fire now, and he could tell by the outline of the ship and its smokestacks that it was sinking quickly.

“Do you see my parents?” Abigail said, hugging herself and looking around desperately.

“No, Miss, I’m sorry, I don’t,” he answered, looking around at all the indistinguishable thrashing bodies in the water now.

Finally as the last of the deck was pulled under the water, extinguishing the flames, they were bathed in an eerie darkness distorted by the flickering shadows highlighted by the moon. The screams were growing less now. Will pulled himself out of the water and sat next to Abigail and looked around.

“What do we do now, Mr. Graham?” she asked.

“Pray,” he said.

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Count Lecter woke to a soft knocking on his door.

“Enter,” he called out groggily.

The door opened and one of his servants poked his head in.

“What is it, Abel?”

“Another ship’s hit the rocks between the strait, sir,” the man said excitedly. “It looks to be going down fast. Do you want us to send the boat out, see if we can pick up any survivors?”

Count Lecter got out of bed and pulled on his silk brocade robe, tying the tasseled belt, as he walked to the double doors, opening them and stepping out onto the second story balcony. He now heard the faint screams, and then spotted flames shooting up from the center of a broken ship. Abel was right, the ship was sinking fast. He would be lucky if anyone survived. Still... “No, Abel. If no one survives, then they aren’t worthy of us. But make sure the torches are lit leading to the house just in case. If there are any survivors we want them to be able to find their way here.”

“Yes, sir,” Abel said with a knowing smile, bowing out of the room and closing the door.

Count Lecter stepped back inside and went to a sideboard in his richly appointed room and poured himself a brandy from a cut crystal decanter, then stepped back out on the balcony and stood at the
railing scenting the rich amber liquor before taking a sip as he watched the ship sink. His room on the upper floor gave him unobstructed view of the ocean. The flames and the full moon gave him a fairly good view of the outline of the ship and he could see that it was more than halfway under the water now. He still heard screams, which was promising. As the deck was pulled under and the ship’s flames were extinguished, leaving the scene in obscure moonlit darkness, he raised his snifter toward the doomed ship and said, “Here’s hoping some of you are strong enough and worthy enough to survive.”

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“What should we do now, Mr. Graham?” Abigail asked, as they drifted on their piece of wood.

Will suddenly spotted pinpoints of light and realized that there was an island on the opposite side of where the ship had just gone down. “There!” he said, pointing. “There’s an island there and I see light on it, so there must be people living on it!” he said excitedly. Thank God, he thought. He was under the impression all the islands in this part of the ocean were uninhabited, but clearly someone must be watching over them.

Will could tell that the tide was pulling them further away from the island and out into open sea, so he took off his life vest and his waiter’s jacket, which he draped over Abigail’s shoulders, removed his bowtie and collar, and then lowered himself back into the cool water.

“What are you doing?” Abagail said.

“We need to get to that island, so I’m going to swim us there.” He grabbed hold of the side of the wooden section and started kicking his legs as hard as he could, aiming them toward the lights. He could still hear a few people screaming and hoped they saw the lights as well and would head for the island. But after about ten minutes of kicking Abigail said, “Mr. Graham, what is that?”

“What is what, Miss?” he panted, still kicking.

“It looks like something is in the water moving towards us.”

Will stopped moving immediately. “What does it look like?” he asked with a touch of panic, looking behind him.

“It looks kind of like a fin maybe?” she said, squinting.

“Heaven help us,” Will said, desperately trying to get back on the wet, slippery wood. Abigail, sensing his distress, grabbed his arm and helped pull him up, and none too soon as a large fin swept past no more than eight feet from them.

“What is that?” Abigail said, voice trembling.

“Shhh! It’s a shark,” Will whispered shakily, “and they hunt by sound and movement, so no talking for a while, okay, Miss?” he said, holding her trembling hands.

She nodded.

However, they had little to worry about. The shark and its many friends had already honed in on the remaining frenzied, thrashing bodies in the water and made a beeline straight for them. Will and Abigail heard the screams change pitch, indicating a whole new level of terror as the sharks found their prey. Abigail put her hands over her ears and closed her eyes, trying to shut out the horror. Will tried, but he could still sense their terror, could practically feel the sharks’ teeth as they bit and ripped and consumed flesh.
Will looked back at the island, his heart sinking. He could tell that they were floating back out to open sea, losing the ground he had gained them, but there was no way he could get back in the water now. He was terrified of the sharks and he was terrified that they would end up lost out on the vast ocean on a tiny piece of wood with no food and no water.

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Count Lecter was still on the balcony when he heard the screams suddenly grow more terrified in their intensity and frowned. Apparently the sharks had arrived. There were unfortunately many species of sharks in these waters and the frenzied thrashing in the water would draw them like bees to honey. This was certainly going to cut down the chance for any survivors, he thought with annoyance. Gradually the screams grew less and less until there was only silence. He drained his glass and went back in his room and closed the balcony doors, then added another log to the fireplace and sat in a wingback chair near the fire. Although the climate in this part of the world was moderate at this time of year, it still got a bit cool at night.

He looked at the clock on the mantle. Dawn was about three hours away. If no one came knocking on the door by then, he and the others would go scour the beachfront and see if anyone had survived. He grew bored easily on this island and looked forward to the entertainment these ships brought him. He sincerely hoped someone of worth managed to survive the sharks and wash up on his island to entertain him. Not to mention the fact that they were always in need of fresh meat for the table.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the wonderful response on the first chapter and for all your comments and kudos. I hope you continue to enjoy the story. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jack Crawford dropped to his knees and kissed the wet sand, never so happy to be on land in his life. For the last couple of hours he had felt like he was trapped in a nightmare. How had this happened? They were headed right down the middle of the strait between the two signal lights, and then all of a sudden they had hit something hidden below the water’s surface and started taking on water fast.

As he stood up on shaky legs and looked around, he was surprised when he spotted lit torches blazing in the dark that seemed to be lighting a path. If there were people living on this island, then he needed to find them and get their help to look for survivors, as unlikely as that was. He had gone into the water only at the very end, right before the ship went under. Despite his best attempts to maintain order and get the passengers to calm down so that he could get them safely into the lifeboats, they were crazed with fear, and most of them were a bit drunk from the festivities, so it had turned into a free-for-all. Still, the ones with life vests should have been able to make it to shore safely. But then the sharks had attacked. As soon as he realized what was happening, he had stopped moving and just let the life jacket keep him afloat while he prayed. The passengers didn’t understand that by screaming and thrashing they were drawing the sharks to them. He had tensed as he felt the brush of a shark go past his legs, and then saw a man not four feet from him pulled under the water. He had never been more frightened in his life than he was at that moment wondering if he was next. The screaming seemed to go on forever, although he knew in reality it was most likely no more than ten minutes. Once everything went quiet he swam for shore hoping the sharks had had their fill and left. The blood in water had looked black in the moonlight, and even now he felt like he was coated in it.

He followed the torches and was surprised when it led to a large stone structure, two stories high with balconies visible under the moonlight. He ran to the front door and pounded on it with the side of his fist. After a few more minutes of pounding, the door opened and a large, thuggish looking man wearing a robe opened the door and looked at him quizzically.

“May I help you?” the man asked, looking nonplussed.

For some reason Jack had the impression the man wasn’t surprised at finding a stranger banging on the door in the middle of the night.

“My ship went down with all hands. Please, I need help searching for survivors,” Jack said desperately.

“Oh, my, that’s terrible,” the man said, looking Jack over, but Jack thought his voice didn’t seem to match the words. “Let me get Count Lecter …

“No need, Cordell, I’m right here,” a voice behind the man said.
As Cordell stepped aside Jack saw a tall man with an aristocratic bearing. He was clearly the master of the house. Although the man was also wearing a robe, Jack thought he didn’t have the appearance of someone who had just woken up.

“I am Count Hannibal Lecter,” the man said, inclining his head. “Did I hear correctly that your ship has sunk? But how awful,” he said, looking suitable distressed.

“I’m Jack Crawford, captain of the Aperitif. My ship hit something going through the strait and started sinking fast. Then a school of sharks came along, attacking everyone in the water. Please, I need help seeing if anyone else made it to shore.”

“Uncle, what is it?” a young man with dark, sleep tousled hair said, coming up and standing next to the Count.

“Randall, there’s been another shipwreck and the captain here needs help looking for survivors. Captain, may I introduce my nephew, Randall Tier.”

“A pleasure,” Jack said, inclining his head. “Wait, did you say another shipwreck?”

“My dear fellow, we have several survivors from the last wreck still in the house. It would seem that this island were cursed.”

“More likely the signal lights marking the safe passage have somehow shifted,” Jack said frowning.

“Perhaps,” the Count said, looking Jack over with a critical eye. He was a large man, powerful looking—clearly an alpha. He was also the captain of the ship so he would be intelligent and strong-willed, a natural leader. There would be plenty of time to determine how this man would fit into his plans, but for now they needed to see if there were other survivors. Variety was the spice of life, after all.

“Let me get dressed and we’ll go out immediately. In the meantime, please come in and warm yourself by the fire,” Count Lecter said, leading Jack through the large open entry room and through a set of double doors into a well-appointed drawing room where a fire was burning low in the fireplace.

As Jack waited, he added a couple pieces of wood to the fire and then let the warmth of the flames seep into his damp, chilled skin. As he turned around to warm his backside he froze as he noticed mounted animal heads on all four walls of the large room. There was a tiger, a lion, a panther, a boar, as well as other animals, and in one corner of the room a huge stuffed grizzly bear was posed standing on its hind legs with paws up as if ready to strike, a fierce look on its face.

“I see you’re admiring my grizzly,” Count Lecter said, coming into the room fully clothed now. “He is one of my prized possessions. He was a clever and formidable beast and it took me two days to track him down and kill him.”

“You’re a hunter then,” Jack said.

“Yes. I find that the world is divided into two kinds of people, the hunter and the hunted. Luckily, I’m a hunter,” the Count said smiling. “Now, let’s go see if any of your people made it to shore.”

The sun was just coming up as Jack, Hannibal, Randall, and the count’s two servants, Abel Gideon and, Cordell Doemling, headed down to the beach.
Will and Abigail had dosed off holding onto each other, and as Will woke up to the dawn just peeking over the horizon he jerked awake, startled, which woke Abigail.

“What is it?” she said, looking around.

“I didn’t mean to fall asleep. I wanted to keep my eye on the island and the area with the lights so we could head back there once I was sure the sharks were gone. What’s wrong?” he said, as he noticed that Abigail was looking at him peculiarly.

“You … you smell like an omega,” she said, looking confused. “But that can’t be. Can it?” she asked.

Dash it all, they had been holding onto each other and she had ended up with her head on his shoulder, her nose near the crook of his neck. There’s no way she could have missed his scent being that close. He cursed himself for being a careless fool. “Yes, Miss, I’m afraid I am,” he said, waiting for the look of revulsion he was sure would follow.

“But you’re a man, right? I mean, this isn’t a disguise?” she said, looking him over.

“Yes, Miss, I am a man … and I’m also an omega.”

“I didn’t know a man could be an omega,” she said cocking her head and looking at him curiously.

“Most people don’t, Miss. Male omegas are fairly rare.”

“Well, that explains why you’re so pretty. I mean guys are generally handsome, but you’re … pretty,” she said shrugging.

“You’re not disgusted by me?” he asked cautiously.

“Disgusted? No, why would I be?”

“A lot of people think omegas should be women alone and that male omegas are … unnatural. We’re thought of as freaks of nature.”

“Well, you were born this way. There’s nothing you could have done about it, so I don’t know why they would think that.”

Will studied the young woman, looking for any sign of deceit, but all he saw was honesty. She really wasn’t bothered by the fact that he was an omega. He felt as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. Someone knew about his status and they weren’t repulsed by him. He smiled. “Thank you, Miss. But if I could ask a favor. If we could please keep this between the two of us. Ship lines won’t employ a male omega and I need this job to make a living. If this could be our little secret?” he asked hopefully.

“Our secret,” she said, holding out her pinky.

Will wrapped his pinky around hers and they smiled at each other, a bond of friendship growing between them.

“By the way, since you did save my life I think it would be okay if you called me Abigail,” the young omega said. “And what might your name be?”

“I’m Will,” he said shyly. “Will Graham. Now, we need to get back to that island, he said
pointing at a shape in the distance that looked no bigger than a shoebox.

“We’ve drifted quite a long way,” Abigail said worriedly.

“Yes we have.  All right, nothing else to be done,” Will said, sliding back into the water and inhaling sharply at how cold it seemed.

“Wait!” Abigail said, looking frantic.  “What if the sharks come back?”

“That’s why I waited until dawn,” Will said, trying to keep his teeth from chattering.  I’m going to swim us back to the island and you’re going to keep a lookout for fins.  With the sun coming up now you’ll be able to spot them from a distance and give me fair warning if you see one.  Okay, Miss? … I mean Abigail?”

“Okay, Will,” Abigail said nervously, scanning the water.

The coolness of the water brought Will fully awake.  He took a couple deep breaths as his body adjusted to the temperature and then he started kicking.  He licked his dry lips.  He was already thirsty and he hadn’t eaten anything since early evening yesterday, so he was worried his energy resources would deplete quickly.

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“It will be more efficient if we split up,” Count Lecter said.  “Captain, you, Randall and I will go up the beach, and Cordell and Abel, you two head down the beach.  Signal us if you find anyone,” he said to the two servants.

The group split up and walked at least two miles in each direction.  Count Lecter’s group found a few bodies that had washed ashore, and quite a few pieces of bodies left over from the sharks that had the Captain turning pale, but they found no one alive.  When they met back with the two servants, a shake of their heads dashed Jack’s hope that anyone else had survived.

Jack looked down the shoreline wistfully at the bits of wreckage scattered on the beach, all that remained of his broken vessel.  She wasn’t a big ship, but she was beautiful.  He had loved that ship, loved being her captain, and he felt a wave of despair knowing he would probably never be allowed to captain a ship again.  His passengers had been some of the wealthiest and most influential families in America, and even though he had done everything by the book, the cruise line would need someone to take the blame for this, and as the captain it would undoubtedly be him.  This would ruin him.  He remembered the shooting star he had seen blaze across the sky right before the crash and wondered if that star had been trying to warn him.  He hung his head.  It would have been better if he had died along with everyone else.

“There were 102 passengers and 30 crew on that ship.  I can’t believe that no one else survived,” Jack said sadly.

Count Lecter observed the man, felt his distress.  “I’m sorry, Captain,” he said softly, putting his hand on the captain’s shoulder and feeling true disappointment himself that there had been only one survivor.  He had been hoping for more.  He looked over at his nephew and saw disappointment reflected on his face.  The Count knew that his nephew was lonely living on this island.  They both were.  They had come to this island six months ago looking for solitude, but as the months had passed solitude had turned into boredom and loneliness.  The only break in that boredom had been the three wrecks that had happened near their island during that time.  Each time a wreck happened they had both entertained hopes that a few omegas might wash up on their shores and that one might take a fancy to young Randall.  At the age of 20, Randall was a young
alpha in his prime with thoughts of settling down and starting a family. But out of the three wrecks only one omega had managed to make it to shore alive, and she was closer to Hannibal’s age. No, fate was not looking kindly upon them.

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Will set a pattern. He would swim for about 30 minutes and then rest for 5, then turn over and place his shoulders against the wood and paddle on his back, thereby using a different set of muscles. He tried to keep his mind busy so he wouldn’t think about how thirsty he was or how his legs were beginning to burn from the strain. He occupied his thoughts with his surprise at how easily Abigail had accepted him. He never thought such a thing was possible. He remembered back to the first time he realized he was an omega and just how different he was.

He was thirteen at the time, and he and his parents were on summer vacation visiting his grandfather’s horse farm in Kentucky when puberty hit and his scent changed, proclaiming him as an omega. His mother was an omega and his father was a beta, and they had just assumed he was going to be a beta, so they had been stunned and horrified at finding out that their only child was a male omega. His mother had immediately whisked him away to a doctor two towns over so he could in no way be connected with his grandfather and bring shame upon him, and he was put on a tonic to suppress his hormones and help dull his scent. Children weren’t normally put on the tonic, but the doctor made an exception considering his special circumstances. Then later that evening his parents had sat him down and explained to him that he must never let it be known that he’s an omega. When he asked why, his mother had explained to him that although there was nothing wrong with him and that they loved him very much, society thought omegas were supposed to be female and that there was a certain prejudice against male omegas. Even the Church considered them contrary to the natural order of things, and under no circumstances would condone a male omega’s marriage to an alpha, or even a beta. Both his parents stressed that if people knew his status his life would become exceedingly difficult. He would be shunned, picked on, possibly expelled from school, denied jobs … he would be a pariah.

At the age of 13 he had never given much thought to alpha/beta/omega dynamics and he had had trouble grasping the whole concept of what his parents were telling him … that is until it was driven home six months later at school. As fate would have it, another boy in his school entered puberty and presented as an omega during lunch period in the school cafeteria. As his scent changed, everyone near him had looked around confused, trying to locate the new omega. When they realized it was this boy, everyone got up from his table and had moved away from him like he had some contagious disease and then had stared at him with a mixture of fascination and disgust. Others in the cafeteria quickly joined them. Then the taunts and insults had started flying, and the boys who had already presented as alphas started touching him lewdly and pulling at his clothes, while taunts like “freak” had rung in Will’s ears. Will had been sitting two tables away and had sat there and watched in horror as he realized that that could have been him. The poor kid was as stunned as everyone else and didn’t know what to do. He sobbed in humiliation as the taunts and fondling by pubescent alphas continued until finally one of the teachers in the cafeteria took notice of what was happening and took him to the principal’s office. His parents were called to come get him … and Will never saw the boy again after that. He heard it rumored that the family had moved away in shame. This was a lesson that was driven home harder than any of his parents’ speeches and warnings.

He’d become a loner after that, living in constant fear of discovery. All though high school he’d wistfully watched other omegas as they flirted with alphas, held hands, attended school dances, and occasionally stole kisses when they thought no one saw. Omegas are affectionate creatures by nature and he longed for this type of interaction, and it was a bitter disappointment to him knowing he was destined to a life living apart and to be denied human contact. During senior prom he had
spent the evening sobbing in his room, thinking how unfair life was. His high school years had been the loneliest years of his life.

After high school he had gained some confidence in his ability to maintain his beta persona, which he had perfected, but he was never totally free of the constant fear that he would slip up somehow. All it would take was one instance where he forgot to take his tonic, or he tilted his head at an alpha, or let loose an omegan whine … just one little slip up had the potential to ruin his life. For that reason he had continued to keep to himself and rejected any overtures of friendship. He thought how different his life would have been if people could see him and accept him as easily as Abigail had.

Will came back to the present and looked toward the island. It was getting closer, but they still had a long way to go and he was tiring and his legs were burning badly. Then he heard words that were music to his ears: “Will, I think I see people on the island.”

* * * * *

“Do you have a radio transmitter or any way I can radio this in?” Jack asked the Count as they turned to head back toward the Count’s home.

“I’m afraid my transmitter is not functioning right now. A tube burned out. But I’m expecting a supply ship in five days’ time which should include a replacement part. You can use the transmitter at that time … or even catch a ride on the supply ship if you like. It can drop you off on the mainland where you can then catch a boat back to the Americas, which is where I assume you’re from by your accent.”

Jack nodded, feeling exhausted now that the adrenalin that had been flooding his body had stopped. He followed the Count back toward the path leading to his home, his shoulders slumped in defeat.

* * * * *

“Hello!” Abigail shouted, waving her arms in the air. “Oh, Will, they don’t see us! We’re too far out!”

“Hello!” Will tried, scrambling back on the wood. But he could see the tiny figures disappearing into the jungle. His heart sank. He would have to keep swimming and he didn’t know how much longer his legs would last, and he was in constant fear that the sharks would return.

* * * * *

Jack entered the Count’s home and the Count said, “I’ll have some water heated and brought up to a guest room so you can bathe.”

“Thank you, Count,” Jack said, rubbing his face tiredly. “I don’t know what I would have done if this island had been deserted.”

Hannibal smiled as he ordered Abel and Cordell to heat water and prepare a bath in one of the guest rooms.

Jack looked around now at the large entry room noticing that there were more animal heads mounted on the stones walls here, along with tapestries depicting violent scenes from hunts. Jack wondered why on earth a hunter would seclude himself on this island. It was unlikely there would be anything challenging here to hunt.
“I have to admit that I’m surprised that anyone lives on this island,” Jack said, “especially in such an elaborate structure. I thought all the islands in this area were deserted.”

“This structure was built many years ago by the Spanish to be used as a monastery.”

“A monastery?”

“Yes. But that’s a story for another time when you’re not so fatigued. Let us step into the drawing room and you can sit by the fire until your bath is prepared.”

Jack stepped into the room ahead of the Count but stopped when he saw a slender, elegant woman with hair like spun gold standing in front of the fireplace looking anxious, and a man sitting on the couch looking as if he didn’t have a care in the world.

“This beautiful woman must be your wife,” Jack said, entering the room, wondering why she looked anxious.

“Oh…no, I’m afraid not,” Hannibal said smiling, looking amused. “May I introduce Miss Bedelia du Maurier and Dr. Frederick Chilton. They are two of the four survivors from the last wreck that I mentioned. They managed to make it to shore in a lifeboat. Miss du Maurier, Dr. Chilton, this is Captain Crawford. I’m afraid his ship also sank and it appears he is the only survivor.”

“Oh my, that’s dreadful!” Miss du Maurier said, coming toward the captain with a hand on her bosom looking truly distressed. “Well, we certainly know how you must feel, having been through it ourselves. I don’t think I shall ever be able to put the memory of it from my mind.”

“Nor shall I,” Jack said sadly, inclining his head at the woman.

“Pretty well shaken up, I imagine,” Dr. Chilton said, standing with a glass in his hand and coming toward him to shake his hand. “You should have a drink,” he said, the smell of alcohol strong on his breath despite the fact it wasn’t even noon yet. “It’ll calm you right down.”

“Perhaps later,” Jack said politely.

“Suit yourself,” Dr. Chilton said shrugging, heading for a liquor cabinet and a refill before going back to his place on the sofa.

“You said there were four survivors?” Jack asked, looking around the room and seeing no one else.

“Ah, yes,” Hannibal said, and Jack couldn’t help but notice the woman looked at the Count pointedly. “The first mate and the other seaman who survived went on a hunting expedition yesterday and have yet to return,” Hannibal said. “There is a lot of wild game on this island and the men grew bored just sitting around and wanted to explore the island and possibly contribute to the table.”

Jack nodded. He would be anxious to speak to the first mate as soon as he returned, find out what he could tell him about the circumstances surrounding the wreck of their ship. With two ships going down in the same area, perhaps he could prove his innocence in the wreck.

“But that was over 24 hours ago,” Miss du Maurier said, and Jack got the feeling this was the reason for her anxiety. “Shouldn’t they have been back by now, Count?”

“Calm yourself, my dear,” Count Lecter said, taking her hand. “I’m sure they were having such a good time they just decided to camp out.”
Jack frowned slightly. Miss du Maurier was clearly an omega and he could smell an undercurrent of worry and fear coming off her. Maybe she was just of a delicate nature. Some omegas were. As such they needed to be treated gently, especially after suffering a traumatic experience as she just had. “I wouldn’t worry, Miss du Maurier,” he said. “We sailors are a hasty lot and like to keep busy. I’m sure they’re fine. I would like to have a word with them when they return, see if they can shed any light on what caused the sinking of their ship.”

“We have the captain’s bath prepared, sir,” Abel interrupted, appearing at the door.

“Thank you, Abel. Captain, if you would follow Abel to your room. And I believe he will have found you some alternative clothing. Yours will need to be washed. Salt can be quite corrosive. I’ll see to getting breakfast prepared. I’m sure everyone is famished. Come down when you’re ready, Captain.”

“Thank you again, Count Lecter. Miss du Maurier, Dr. Chilton, I’ll see you shortly,” he said, bowing out of the room.

As soon as the captain was out of sight, Bedelia approached Hannibal. The smell of her growing unease was a bitter taste upon his tongue and was frankly becoming annoying.

“Really, Count, don’t you think you should send someone to check on our men. Perhaps they were injured and are unable to make it back. Perhaps they were attacked by some wild beast. Perhaps they lost their way.”

The Count smiled indulgently at the omega. “Now, now, Miss du Maurier, as you can see we have a new guest who is in need of our attention. If they’re not back by tomorrow I promise I’ll search for them personally. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll see to breakfast,” he said, exiting the room.

As soon as they were gone Dr. Chilton said, “I don’t know what you’re so worried about, my dear.”

“There’s something terribly wrong here, I feel it in my bones. The Count is not what he appears.”

“Nonsense. The Count is a perfect gentleman, and we should be grateful to be in such good hands while we await the supply ship and our return home. And he has the most marvelous liquor cabinet. Just imagine if we had been stranded on this island and it had been deserted,” he said.

“I’m beginning to wonder if our chances wouldn’t have been better,” she muttered.

“Eh?”

“Nothing, Dr. Chilton. Go back to your drink,” she said, looking at the man with disgust. Now that the Captain was here, maybe she would feel a bit safer. She didn’t trust Count Lecter. Here was an alpha with looks and title and apparent wealth living on an island alone with his nephew and two male servants. Something just seemed terribly wrong with this picture.

Randall followed his uncle to the kitchen. “She’s growing more and more suspicious,” he said. “Have you decided what you’re going to do with her? Will you take her as your mate?”

Hannibal hesitated. Bedelia was beautiful, sophisticated, charming and intelligent, but he felt no spark between the two of them. He also sensed a coldness about her, a lack of passion, and that was unusual for an omega. He wanted children and lots of them to begin the process of rebuilding the Lecter bloodline, which had been cut down so ruthlessly, and not for the first time he
entertained doubts that she would be a good mate and mother. She would make an acceptable mate, just not the one he would have chosen had he had others to choose from. His perfect mate would be strong-willed, yet tender hearted. She would be clever and passionate with a protective and nurturing nature.

He sighed. He supposed such a creature with all the qualities he desired was not likely to wash up on these shores anytime soon. Since she was the only omega to have survived three wrecks, perhaps he should take it as a sign that she’s the one and stop procrastinating. Yes, perhaps within the next day or two he should give Miss du Maurier the answers she was so desperately seeking and put her curiosity to rest once and for all, for better or for worse.

Chapter End Notes

In the next chapter Will and Abigail finally make it to shore and surprise the Count and his household.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Happy Sunday to all. Hope everyone's having a relaxing day. Here's a new chapter to read when you feel like taking a break from watching the Olympics. I hope you continue to enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the time Will and Abigail neared the shore of the island the sun was sitting low on the horizon and nightfall would be upon them shortly. Will was beyond exhausted and his legs were burning and starting to cramp badly. Fortunately, when they got close to the island the tide had started working in their favor and helped pull their makeshift raft the rest of the way to shore.

Abigail, seeing Will struggle over the last several hours, had offered to take turns with him, and he had reluctantly allowed it a couple of times so he could rest his legs, but as hard as she tried, she wasn’t a strong swimmer and little ground was gained. So Will had pushed himself past his point of endurance until they finally reached the shore.

Abigail jumped off the piece of wood and ran onto the beach, jumping up and down in her bare feet and clapping merrily. “We did it, Will! We actually made it! We’re safe now!”

Will smiled shakily. He tried to stand up but his legs wobbled and collapsed. He ended up crawling onto the beach and collapsing onto his back, the last of his reserves depleted. He had been going the last couple of hours on shear willpower alone and couldn’t even lift his head up now.

“Abigail, I need you to do me a favor. I need you to find those torches that we spotted last night. Even if they’re not lit you should be able to spot them if you walk along the beach. They’ll be lining a path leading somewhere, I’m sure of it. We have to find those people we spotted on the beach before darkness falls, so you need to hurry. Can you do that, Miss? I hate to ask this of you, but I’m afraid I’m all done in right now.”

“Of course, Will. Just leave it to me. I’ll find help. You just rest,” she said worriedly, noting his pallor before taking off.

The sun-warmed sand was soothing against Will’s back, and he closed his eyes and fell immediately into an exhausted sleep.

* * * * *

Count Lecter and his nephew were having an enjoyable supper with their guests. He had made a lovely braised roast with a side of jungle greens, and topped with a sweet sauce made from wild berries. The captain had eaten with relish and complimented the chef saying he hadn’t tasted finer in all his travels.

Count Lecter was pleasantly surprised to find that the captain was a learned man with a good education and was a delightful conversationalist. It was quite a nice change from Miss du Maurier’s increasing silence at the table and Dr. Chilton’s drunken babble, not to mention those
two coarse sailors’ attempts at conversation. The table was much improved by their absence.

The captain, despite his lingering sadness, had told quite a few humorous seafaring tales, and even Miss du Maurier smiled and seemed more relaxed and talkative with the captain at the table. He would have to decide the captain’s fate quickly because he knew sooner or later Miss du Maurier would approach him with her suspicions, especially when the two sailors continued to fail to reappear. The captain was a large alpha and would be formidable, so the sooner he decided his fate, the better.

* * * * *

Abigail walked up and down the beach examining the tree line. It took her around 30 minutes before she finally spotted an unlit torch and what appeared to be a path leading into the jungle. She turned back to Will to signal she had found it, but he was lying down unmoving. He had been pale when she left him and really didn’t look well and she was concerned for him. She felt a strong connection with him and knew in her heart she would be dead if it weren’t for him. She needed to repay the favor by finding help for him, and quickly.

She nervously followed the trail, hearing strange noises and wondering if there were dangerous beasts living in this jungle. Something slithered across the trail in front of her and she screeched and jumped back, trying to discern if it was a snake or not. The light was growing dimmer and the shadows were causing her to see all manner of things.

Finally she spotted the house, a huge stone dwelling, and ran to the door and grabbed the doorknocker with both hands and knocked loudly. She waited a few anxious seconds and then knocked again until the door opened to a slightly portly man who looked at her with a stunned look on his face.

* * * * *

Count Lecter and company were in the drawing room enjoying after-dinner drinks when they heard the knock on the door. Exchanging surprised looks, they all got up and headed for the entrance room.

“Maybe our sailors have returned,” Bedelia said hopefully.

Hannibal knew for a certainty that was not the case, but had no idea who it could be.

“Abel, who is it?” Hannibal asked, seeing the man speaking to someone through the open door.

Abel turned around with a look of surprise still on his face and said, “Sir, there’s a young lady at the door saying she has been in a shipwreck and needs assistance for a friend back on the beach.”

Hannibal couldn’t hide his own surprise. They had searched the beachfront quite thoroughly. Where had this young lady and her friend come from?

Jack moved quickly to the doorway and Abel moved aside. Jack recognized the young Hobbs girl immediately. “Miss Hobbs! I’m so happy to see you safe and sound. And I hear there’s another survivor? Do you know who it is?”

“It’s Mr. Graham, Captain. But he needs assistance.”

“I know Will Graham,” the captain said, to the people at large. “He’s one of my stewards, hired on just this year. A quiet man but a hard worker.”
Abigail spotted the others standing behind the captain and scanned their faces hopefully. “Were there other survivors then, Captain?” she asked with such hope that it broke Jack’s heart. He knew the girl had been traveling with her parents. “I’m afraid not, Miss,” he said in a quiet voice.

“Oh,” she said, looking down at the ground and nodding, looking like she wanted to cry, but holding back her tears. “I suspected as much,” she said softly.

*There’s strength in this one*, Hannibal thought approvingly, watching the exchange.

“Is Mr. Graham injured?” Jack asked, wondering if the sharks had gotten their teeth into him.

“No, I think he’s just exhausted. He swam all day long in that chilly water and he’s looking pale and his legs don’t appear to be working properly.”

*Swam all day?* Hannibal thought, puzzled. Still, there would be time for answers later. “Show us the way, Miss Hobbs,” Hannibal said, jumping into action. “Doctor Chilton, we may have need of your services, if you please.”

Hannibal signaled Cordell to follow along as well, and the group headed down to the beach. Abel trailed behind them lighting the torches as it was growing dark now.

Hannibal considered the young woman leading the way. She was certainly an unexpected but welcome treat. She was quite lovely with her long sleek hair, freckles, and big blue eyes. She was certainly too young for him but seemed to be just the right age for Randall. He looked over at his nephew walking by his side and saw him appraising her as well, but with an almost excited, predatory look. He put his hand on the boy’s shoulder. He must have a chat with him later about schooling his features. It doesn’t do for the wolves to frighten the sheep. But he couldn’t blame his nephew. It had been too long since his nephew had seen a female his own age, and although he couldn’t tell the young woman’s status as of yet due to the salt from the water coating her skin, she had the delicate look of an omega. It seemed that providence was with them after all. Randall was in need of a mate, and this young woman looked to be the perfect age for him.

Hannibal moved up next to the Captain. “Miss Hobbs had family aboard the ship, I take it.”

“She was traveling with her mother and father. I believe they were the only family she had,” he stated sadly.

*Good*, Hannibal thought. *No mate then. And with no one to go back to she would accept her new life much quicker.*

“There!” Abigail called out, pointing down the beach once they emerged from the jungle and stepped out onto the sand.

Hannibal watched as Miss Hobbs hiked her dress up and ran down the beach to this Mr. Graham and then knelt down next to him. He could see the young girl felt concern for this man. He came up next to the girl and looked down on him. He didn’t need to scent this one to know he wasn’t an alpha. Still, a beta with intelligence and strong will could sometimes provide a challenge. And a beta’s flesh was typically more tender and savory than an alpha’s tough hide.

The man’s eyes were closed and he did have a pale cast to his skin. Dr. Chilton knelt down, giving him a cursory exam, and the young man’s eyes fluttered open.

“We’re here to help you,” Dr. Chilton said as Will startled a bit at seeing all the people standing over him. “Can you stand?”
Will spotted Abigail’s worried face then and gave her a small smile and relaxed a bit. She had brought him help. Then he spotted the captain and he broke out in a big smile as he realized there had been other survivors.

“Captain, it’s good to see you alive and well,” Will rasped, his throat sandpaper dry, while he struggled to sit up.

“Same here, Mr. Graham.”

“Were there many survivors?” he asked hopefully, looking over at Abigail, who lowered her eyes sadly.

His smile faltered as he realized her parents must not have survived.

“We’ll talk later, Mr. Graham. Now, are you able to walk?” Jack asked.

“I’m not sure,” Will said. “I was having some pretty bad leg cramps, probably due to dehydration,” he said as he tried to stand with Jack’s help, but his legs wouldn’t support him and he fell back down. “I’m sorry, my legs don’t appear to be working at the present time,” he said, looking embarrassed.

Hannibal nodded at Cordell, and Will made a squeak of indignation as the big man scooped him into his arms easily as if he weighed no more than a sack of potatoes. Will felt a sudden touch of panic. Surely a man this large and strong was an alpha, and being this close to him he might be able to pick up on his status, despite the salt coating his skin and clothes. Will knew salt was a natural scent neutralizer. Also, he had never in his life been held against an alpha’s chest like this before. It was inappropriate and he felt his cheeks getting hot. At the same time though he realized how warm the man was. His own clothes were still damp and he was chilled to the bone, his teeth chattering slightly. Looking up at the man he seemed to be paying him no never-mind. Will scented him discretely and it was strange, the man looked like an alpha but he didn’t smell like one. He actually didn’t smell like anything, just the slight sour tang of body odor. That was very peculiar. As the man continued to ignore him, Will relaxed a bit against his body, sighing at the heat the man was giving off. The man continued to ignore him and he relaxed further.

As they headed back through the jungle to the Count’s home, Abigail walked next to Cordell, looking at Will like she didn’t want to lose sight of him. Hannibal supposed he shouldn’t be surprised. When two people go through a traumatic experience together it tends to create a certain bond. That was probably why Miss du Maurier was so fretful about her two sailors.

Hannibal thought that this had turned into quite an interesting group of survivors this time around now. Certainly more interesting than the last batch with Dr. Chilton, who was drunk half the time, and those two coarse sailors, who he had gotten rid of as quickly as he could. He had to admit he was eager to hear the story of how Miss Hobbs and this beta had survived the wreck and the sharks and made it to shore almost 12 hours later. When Mr. Graham had opened his eyes and smiled, his whole face had lit up, and Hannibal had to admit he was very fair of face, almost feminine in his look. He didn’t look the type to be able to survive a shipwreck. But yet he and Miss Hobbs had managed to survive when only one alpha had managed to do so. Quite the puzzle.

When they reached the house the Count directed Cordell to take Will directly to the drawing room and sit him near the fire while he got two blankets. He draped one over Will’s shoulders and gave the other to his nephew to wrap around Miss Hobbs. Dr. Chilton had Abel bring two large glasses of water for Miss Hobbs and Mr. Graham, and they both drank thirstily. When the glasses were nearly drained Hannibal decided it was time to introduce himself to the two newcomers.
“Miss Hobbs, Mr. Graham, I’d like to introduce myself. I am Count Hannibal Lecter, and this is my nephew, Randall Tier. I’d like to welcome you to our home, although I wish it were under more pleasant circumstances. And may I also present Miss Bedelia du Maurier and Dr. Frederick Chilton.”

“My, you’re a pretty little thing,” Dr. Chilton said, walking over to Abigail and taking her hand and kissing it.

Hannibal put his hand on his nephew’s shoulder to stop the low growl directed at the doctor which fortunately only he had heard.

“Thank you,” she said, pulling her hand away nervously.

The doctor hadn’t noticed anything amiss as he headed to the liquor cabinet for a refill.

“Miss du Maurier and Dr. Chilton are guests of mine from the last shipwreck,” Hannibal added.

“The last shipwreck!?” Miss Hobbs exclaimed.

Mr. Graham looked up stunned at that bit of information.

“Yes, I’m afraid so, not five days past. Pardon me for asking,” Hannibal said, looking between Miss Hobbs and Mr. Graham, “but I can contain my curiosity no longer. How did the two of you survive and make it to land so long after the wreck? Perhaps you can appease my curiosity while we wait for your rooms and baths to be prepared.”

“Oh, it was awful,” Abigail spoke up, shrugging off the blanket and standing in front of the fireplace looking wide awake, but Hannibal noticed Mr. Graham’s eyes were starting to droop as if he were falling asleep.

Miss Hobbs launched into the story. She turned out to be an excellent storyteller, animated with very expressive hands. It was hard not to be captivated by her. Hannibal noticed his nephew certainly was.

Abigail told the story starting from the New Year’s party with her parents when the ship hit something and how Mr. Graham had taken charge, ordering them above deck and assisting her father. Then finding her on deck later after she got separated from her mother and helping her into a life vest. Then the blast that knocked them both into the water, Will finding the large piece of wood for the two of them to get upon, and the screams and struggles of the living as Will moved them away from danger as the ship sank. As she described the sharks passing mere feet away from their makeshift raft you could have heard a pin drop. Everyone was riveted … everyone except the hero of the story who seemed to have dosed off.

As Abigail concluded the story about the long swim to the island, there were exclamations all around at how brave the pair had been. The Count stood up and removed the empty glass from Mr. Graham’s hand. His opinion of the beta went up several notches with Miss Hobbs’ story. Despite his less than rugged looks, this one was a survivor. He was apparently smart, determined, and strong of will. He didn’t know of many people who could have swam that long without giving up, especially knowing that there were sharks in the water.

“The baths are ready for our guests,” Cordell announced.

“Thank you, Cordell. Miss Hobbs, I’m afraid we have no ladies maids here, so I hope you can manage on your own.”
“I can offer my assistance if you need it,” Miss du Maurier volunteered.

“I assure you, I’m not some helpless little girl,” she said, looking between the two of them and giving them a little teenage cheek that Hannibal found to be quite amusing.

“May I escort you upstairs and show you to your room,” Randall asked, suddenly appearing next to her and offering her his arm.

She blushed prettily and nodded, taking his arm.

Hannibal nodded his approval of his nephew’s behavior. If Miss Hobbs was indeed an omega, it would be nice if Randall could romance her a bit and encourage her to join the family willingly.

“Cordell, Mr. Graham will need your assistance,” he said, looking at the sleeping man. “Carry him upstairs and help him with his bath and then put him to bed. He’s exhausted.”

Cordell scooped him up again and Will awoke with a start, looking like he didn’t know where he was for a minute. Hannibal saw him notice the mounted heads on the walls for the first time, and he looked disturbed by them.

“You’ll feel much better after a good night’s sleep, Mr. Graham,” Jack said, patting his shoulder before Cordell carried him out of the room.

Cordell carried him up the stairs and into a large room with a four poster bed, and Will saw a large copper tub set in front of a roaring fire, the water still steaming. He had to admit it looked good and the hot water would do wonders for the muscles in his legs. Cordell set him on the side of the bed and then knelt down in front of him and started unbuttoning his shirt.

“What are you doing!?” Will said, gripping the top of his shirt to keep Cordell from going any further.

Cordell looked surprised. “I’m going to help you undress and then I’m going to put you in the tub. If you’re not able to stand you won’t be able to undress and walk over and get into the tub without my assistance.”

Will realized the truth of his words and reluctantly put both his hands on the bed and blushed furiously as Cordell helped him strip. Will didn’t know what it was about the man, but Cordell was still not letting off any kind of scent indicating that he was an alpha or beta … or even an omega. He also didn’t seem to be curious about Will’s status. He hadn’t tried to scent him at all. It made Will feel more at ease being around the big man, although this was still highly embarrassing.

Once he was naked, hands discretely over his lap, he endured Cordell picking him up and lowering him into the steaming bath. He sighed as the warmth engulfed him and he felt all the muscles in his body immediately starting to relax. This was just what he needed.

“I’ll go see if I can find you something to wear now, sir,” Cordell said picking up Will’s salt crusted clothes.

“Oh, wait! There are a couple of items in the pocket of my trousers,” Will said.

Cordell fished out a pocket knife and a small vial that he looked at curiously before setting both on the dresser.

As Will heard the door click shut behind him he thought how lucky he was that he had had the vial
on him. The vial contained a scent-neutralizing solution that his father had helped him develop. His father was a fisherman by trade, but he had enjoyed hunting small game around the bayou where they had lived, and all good hunters know the value of neutralizing your scent so the prey doesn’t catch wind of you. His neutralizer was a combination of baking powder, cornstarch, distilled water and vinegar. He had kept a small vial on him at all times in case he started sweating aboard the ship. When that happened he would excuse himself briefly and run to the lavatory and apply a dab behind his neck and to both wrists to help neutralize any telltale scent, no matter how faint. Thank heavens he had that on him, especially since his omega tonic was now lying at the bottom of the ocean.

He dunked his head below the water and grabbed a bar of soap off a small table situated next to the tub and started lathering his hair. The soap had a wonderful exotic scent to it, smelling a lot like the jungle itself. After he soaped up and then dunked his head back under the water to rinse his hair, he lay back and just let the heat soak into his sore leg muscles. He was exhausted and he couldn’t stop his eyes from fluttering shut. Before he knew it he was sound asleep.

Hannibal had gotten all his guests situated for the evening and was bringing a glass of juice made from island fruit to Mr. Graham to help with his dehydration. He saw Cordell heading toward Mr. Graham’s room with some clean clothes.

“You found something suitable for the gentleman?”

“Yes, sir. He’s around Randall’s size so I picked out a few of his things.”

“What is your impression of the man?” Hannibal asked, curious. There was something odd about Mr. Graham that he couldn’t quite put his finger on. His bravery seemed at odds with his almost delicate looks.

“He’s quiet and polite,” Cordell said, shrugging. “He didn’t want me to help him disrobe at first, seemed downright embarrassed about it, in fact, until I pointed out that he couldn’t disrobe and get into the tub by himself. I’ll tell you something strange though, sir, I’ve never seen such beautiful skin on a man before.”

“Hmm. Thank you, Cordell. I’ll take the clothes in to Mr. Graham. I believe Miss Hobbs has finished her bath, so you and Abel can empty her tub so she can retire.”

“Certainly, sir,” he said nodding, as he turned and walked off toward Abigail’s room.

Hannibal went to Will’s door and knocked softly.

Will came out of his doze and assumed it was Cordell coming back with the promised clothes, so he said, “Come in,” too tired and too relaxed to even open his eyes. “Thank you, Cordell. Just set them on the bed please,” he said.

Hannibal said nothing as he set the glass of juice on the table next to the towel and put the clothes on the bed. He stood next to the tub looking down at the man. Mr. Graham had his head reclined on the back of the tub and his arms on either side of it looking totally relaxed. His hair was wet and curling around his face and his cheeks and lips were rosy from the steam. The column of his throat … Hannibal swallowed and licked his lips as he observed that vulnerable creamy white throat. His hairless chest had drops of water glistening on it from the light of the fire. Cordell was certainly right about his skin. It was absolutely flawless. Hannibal’s eyes trailed down his chest to the beginnings of a flat stomach that disappeared under the water. He couldn’t see beyond the water because it was cloudy from the soap, then frowned, feeling slightly off balance as he wondered why he would even be looking in that direction in the first place.
“Just a few more minutes, okay?” Will said, eyes still closed. “The heat from the water is soothing my leg muscles immensely,” he said sighing, stretching one leg out and pointing a rather elegant foot before dropping it back in the water.

Will frowned slightly when he heard no answer; then realized he was picking up another scent that was mingling with the scent of the soap. His nostrils flared as he tried to analyze it … then his eyes flew open as he realized what he was smelling was the scent of pure, unadulterated alpha.

He was stunned to see Count Lecter standing next to the tub looking down at him and sat up immediately, making a sort of undignified squawk as he brought his knees up, wrapping his arms around them, blushing furiously. “I thought you were Cordell,” he said, embarrassed that an alpha had been standing there looking at him naked in the tub.

“Cordell is helping Abel empty Miss Hobbs’ tub so I brought the clothes myself. How are you feeling?”

“Much better now, thank you,” Will said, starring down at the water.

“Good. Do you need my assistance getting out of the tub?”

“No!” Will said, feeling aghast at the thought, blushing an even darker red. Then realizing how rude that must have sounded he said, “What I mean is, I’m feeling a lot better now. I think I can manage on my own. But thank you for the kind offer,” he added.

“All right then, I’ll leave you to get on with it. As soon as you’re finished, Cordell and Abel can remove the tub and you can retire. A good night’s sleep will do you the world of good. But drink that juice first,” he said, pointing at the glass. “The fruit contains potassium that will help with your dehydration and the cramping you were experiencing in your legs.”

“Thank you, Count, truly. I shudder at the thought of what Abigail and I would be going through right now if you hadn’t been here on this island.”

Hannibal smiled, pleased at the courtesy and bowed his head slightly as he turned to leave the room.

“Oh, Count?” Will said, twisting his upper body to look behind him at the man and putting his hands on the side of the tub. “Could I ask one favor?”

“Certainly,” the Count said, curious.

“Abigail … it hasn’t really sunk in yet that her parents are dead. When we were out on the ocean I believe she was holding on to a small thread of hope that they made it to shore, and once we made it to shore she’s been too busy to really think about it, but when she’s alone in her room with nothing but her thoughts, the reality of it is going to come crashing down on her pretty hard and … well some people like to be left alone in their grief, but others need a shoulder to cry on. I was wondering if perhaps you or your nephew or Miss du Maurier could check in on her. I would but I’m not sure if my legs would carry me that far.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry to hear that. But you’re right,” Will said nodding, “he’ll understand how she’s feeling. Thank you, Count,” Will said, looking grateful. “And goodnight to you. I’ll see you in the morning.”
“Good-night, Mr. Graham,” Hannibal said, closing the door behind him. He went and spoke with his nephew about Abigail and then went to his own room to retire. It had been quite an eventful day and he was exhausted considering he had been up since around 3:00 this morning. He tugged on the pull bell and Abel came immediately to help him undress.

“So, what do you think of this new batch, sir?” Abel asked while unbuttoning his shirt.

“An interesting mix. The captain is clearly a force to be reckoned with and I look forward to spending some quality time with him and seeing where he will fit into our plans. Young Abigail seems a sweet yet spirited girl, and if she’s an omega I’m optimistic that she may be well suited for Randall. If I can win Miss du Maurier over we may have the makings of a real family. Dr. Chilton is getting on my nerves, but even though he’s a beta you never know when you might need the services of a physician, especially when the time comes for child birthing.”

“And the young man?” Abel asked. “Cordell says he’s an unusual sort. Not coarse like those other two sailors we had.”

“No, he’s not,” Hannibal said thoughtfully. “Yes, he is very unusual. He’s quite the contradiction. He’s a beta who would appear to have the heart of an alpha, but he also appears to be shy, modest, caring and kind-hearted.” *I wish Bedelia was more like him,* came the unbidden thought. “However, despite whatever fine qualities Mr. Graham may have, he is a beta and we have only one use for betas on this island. Randall’s been begging me to let him do a hunt by himself. I don’t want to start him off with an alpha, so Mr. Graham may be perfect for his first solo hunt.”

“Indeed, sir,” Abel said, smiling.

But then Hannibal’s mind turned back to how the man’s pale skin had almost seemed to glow as he had lounged in the tub. His skin had looked so succulent he had wanted to fall upon him and sink his teeth into that creamy throat. He felt an unexpected pull in the vicinity of his groin at the thought and frowned, feeling confused and embarrassed at the reaction. What was wrong with him? Yes, the sooner Mr. Graham was dealt with and gracing their table, the better. If things worked out, maybe Hannibal would serve him up at a feast celebrating his nephew taking Miss Hobbs as his mate and he taking Miss du Maurier as his mate. The young man’s flesh looked so tender and succulent. Yes, it was time he stopped procrastinating and settled down and started producing heirs to replenish the Lecter bloodline.

“Life has been so much more interesting and fun since you moved the signal lights,” Abel said, pulling him from his thoughts.

“Yes, that was a stroke of brilliance on my part,” Hannibal said, smiling, all teeth now. “It’s just too bad the sharks are taking more than their fair share. I hadn’t anticipated so few survivors.”

“They have been rather greedy. Well, goodnight, sir.”

“Goodnight, Abel. Tomorrow should prove to be an interesting day.”

Chapter End Notes

In the next chapter, now that Will is without his omegan tonic he feels an unexpected attraction growing toward the Count, one that he must keep hidden at all cost.
Will woke before dawn, as was his habit, and got up slowly, testing his legs. He had had a really hard time getting out of the bathtub after the Count had left his room last night, but at least his legs were supporting him this morning, although they were quite stiff.

He poured water from the water basin into a bowl and washed his hands, face and the back of his neck with the scented soap, and then applied his scent neutralizer. Holding the vial up to the light he figured he might have enough to last a few days if he used it sparingly, but if he got a chance he needed to explore the kitchen here and see if they had the baking soda, cornstarch and vinegar he needed to make more. They were all fairly common ingredients found in most kitchens, but who knew if they had them here on this island.

He dressed in the clothes left for him, which included a pair of beige linen trousers, a white cotton long-sleeved dress shirt, and suspenders. The clothes had a slightly alpha scent to them, which he found a little disconcerting, but that would only aid in concealing his scent. He noticed his shoes had been cleaned and left by the fireplace to dry. He made his bed and picked up the empty juice glass and headed downstairs toward the kitchen thinking he could take a quick look around before anyone else was up, and was surprised to find the Count, and not one of the servants, already up and in the midst of preparing breakfast.

“Ah, Mr. Graham,” the Count said, looking up from kneading some type of dough, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows. “I see you are an early riser as well.”

“When you work on a cruise ship it’s up before dawn every day getting things ready for the guests. It becomes habit,” he said, eyes following the flex of muscle in the Count’s forearms and the way his hands and fingers worked the dough. “Thank you for the juice, by the way,” he said, setting the glass in the sink. It helped a great deal. Is there anything I can help you with?” he asked, watching the Count knead the bread but then forcing himself to glance up and make eye contact like a beta would. “I know you weren’t expecting to have so many unexpected guests thrust upon you so unexpectedly.”

“Nonsense. It gets lonely here on this island and it’s a pleasure having guests.”

Will nodded. He had been wondering about that. He was just about to ask the Count why he and his nephew lived alone on the island with just two servants when a familiar voice cut him off.

“Good morning!” Jack said in his booming voice. “Do I smell coffee?”

“Good morning, Captain,” Will said, smiling at his boss.

“Good morning, Captain,” Hannibal said, smiling. “Another early riser, I see. Please, both of you help yourselves to coffee. The pot is on the stove. And how does sausages, wild bird eggs, croissants
and fresh fruit sound for breakfast?”

Will’s stomach decided to make itself known at that time with a loud grumble, much to his embarrassment, which had Jack and the Count laughing.

“Well, I see someone’s hungry,” Hannibal said, looking at Will with amusement.

“Sorry,” Will said, looking sheepish. “I didn’t eat anything yesterday and I’m afraid my stomach has decided to berate me for it.”

“Of course, you must be starving. Well, you will enjoy my sausages. I make them myself,” the Count said, smiling.

* * * * *

Will sighed in contentment as he ate his breakfast. The Count really was a marvelous cook. Everyone was seated around the table with the exception of Dr. Chilton, who he gathered was a late riser, and there was comfortable conversation going on all around. Will found out a supply ship was due in four days’ time, and he felt better knowing he just had to keep his status hidden for four more days until he could reach the mainland and seek out a doctor to get more of his tonic.

As Will observed Abigail he could see she looked a little puffy-eyed this morning, but otherwise seemed in good spirits. She was wearing a lovely pale blue short-sleeved cotton dress with a white middy collar tied loosely in the front and he wondered where the dress came from, but then assumed some luggage from Miss du Maurier’s ship had probably made it to shore among the wreckage. The dress looked lovely on her and he was pleased to see that she and Randall were currently conversing like old friends, so it looked like his visit last night had done her a world of good. He made brief eye contact with the Count and gave a little nod of appreciation for his help in that regard.

“Listen, Count,” Jack said. “I was thinking last night, and we’re only about 50 miles from the mainland. If you have a power boat of any kind that we could borrow, Will and I, or possibly one of those two sailors, could make our way to the mainland, report what happened, and send a rescue boat back to pick up the others. We can also see about getting you a new tube for that radio of yours.

“Eager to leave so soon,” the Count said jokingly, but Will sensed an undercurrent of disappointment as well. “Well I’m afraid I only have one launch, and it’s currently under repair. Cordell has been working on it, but Lithuanians are not the best mechanics. I'm afraid you'll have to be patient a few days longer.”

Will noticed that Miss du Maurier was looking at the Count strangely, but she didn’t say anything. “Well, I know a few things about boat engines if you’d like me to take a look at it,” he volunteered. As much as he was currently enjoying the company and being on this lovely island, the longer he went without his tonic, the greater the chance of his status being discovered. A recommendation from the captain would ensure that he would be able to obtain a new position quickly on another ship, but if the captain found out he’s an omega, not only would he not get a recommendation, but word would get around and he would be banned from working on another ship. No, as nice as it was here, he needed to get back to the mainland as quickly as possible.

“That’s kind of you to offer, Mr. Graham,” the Count said, “but I believe Cordell mentioned something about a belt being broken. Once again we shall have to wait for the supply boat to see if we can obtain a new one.”
“Oh, I see,” Will said, feeling disappointment.

After breakfast, Jack excused himself to take a walk along the beach. Will knew he was sentimental about his ship and suspected he was going to look through the pieces that may have washed ashore and that he would want to be alone. Abigail also departed, telling him that Randall was taking her to see his secret place on the island. Miss du Maurier had gone back up to her room right after breakfast, and the doctor still hadn’t made an appearance yet. The Count was back in his kitchen, possibly seeing to preparations for lunch, so Will wandered the downstairs looking at the furnishings, paintings, tapestries, knickknacks, and such. Other than the heads mounted everywhere, the place had an elegant, old world charm to it. He peeked into one room where the door was slightly ajar, and was surprised to see a whole wall filled with books.

He pushed the door open and stepped into the room looking at the books in awe. He had never known anyone to own so many books. The entire right-hand wall was filled floor to ceiling with books.

The room appeared to be an office of sorts. There was a large carved wooden desk in the middle of the room and a fireplace set in the wall behind it with a wing backed chair set off to the side. He could picture the Count choosing a book and then sitting by the fireplace to read. He wondered if the Count would mind if he borrowed a book while he was here to help pass the time.

He walked over to the bookshelves and started scanning the titles. One entire section seemed to be books in a foreign language, but then he came across another section with the classics. He looked up at a shelf above his head … and there was *Moby Dick*! He had always wanted to read *Moby Dick* but had never had the opportunity. There was a ladder on some sort of sliding rail, and he slid the ladder over to where he needed it and climbed a couple steps and removed *Moby Dick* from the shelf. He stepped down off the ladder and was opening the leather binding as he turned, anxious to go to his room and start reading … and nearly ran into Count Lecter who, it would appear, had entered the room unheard and had been standing there watching him. He’d bitten his tongue painfully to prevent the omegan cry of surprise that had nearly escaped his lips.

He took a step back to put some distance between them and found his back now against the ladder. “I apologize, Count,” he said, a bit flustered, “but I spotted this magnificent library and thought I’d borrow a book to read to help me pass the time. I hope you don’t mind,” he said, resisting the urge to show his neck and finding it difficult to make eye contact like he knew he should.

The Count was only standing three feet away from Will, closer than he would have liked, and every breath he took was filling his lungs with the scent of pure, undiluted alpha. The tonic he had been taking had muted the effects an alpha had on him, but he had been off his tonic for over 24 hours now and the Count’s heady scent was making all his repressed omega impulses wake up and take notice. And oh boy were they taking notice. The Count was a handsome, virile man and exuded a confidence that Will couldn’t help being drawn to. His heady scent was actually making him feel slightly dizzy. He swallowed, once again resisting the sudden urge to tilt his head and show the alpha his throat and realized he hadn’t had to fight that impulse since he was young.

“Where’s Abigail?” the Count asked, studying him curiously.

“I gather that Randall took her to see his secret place. They left about 30 minutes ago,” Will said, and he was alarmed to find that his voice was a bit shaky.

“Ah, his secret place,” Hannibal said, staring at him with those piercing, dark eyes.

“So what is this secret place?” Will asked, looking down, trying to mask his unease.
“It’s a beautiful spot with an inlet of fresh water and a small waterfall. There are orchids and other exotic plants growing around the entire area. Abigail should be flattered. He doesn’t take just anyone to his secret place.”

“I get the feeling your nephew might be getting a little sweet on Abigail.”

“She is a charming girl.” And quite the lovely young omega, he thought, now that he knew for certain.

Will nodded in agreement, but he was feeling more and more uncomfortable. He needed to put some distance between them.

“So, what book have you chosen?” the Count asked, actually stepping closer to him and reaching a hand out to angle the book Will was holding so he could see the title on the cover. “Ah, Moby Dick, a personal favorite of mine.”

Will worked on controlling his breathing. A beta would not react to an alpha moving into their personal space in a nonthreatening manner. “I’ve been wanting to read this for ages but never had the opportunity. I hope you don’t mind if I borrow it while I’m here,” he said, sounding a little breathless to his own ears, and glancing over the Count’s shoulder at the doorway.

“No, not at all. In fact, take it as my gift to you.”

Will did look at the Count now, aghast. “Oh, no! I didn’t mean … I couldn’t possibly accept it!” Will said, cheeks pink with embarrassment. This was obviously an expensive book with its heavy leather binding and gold gilded pages.

“Nonsense,” Hannibal said, shrugging his shoulders. “Take it as a reminder of your time here.”

The Count’s simple action of shrugging caused a ripple of muscle beneath the white cotton shirt he was wearing that drew Will’s eye so that he found himself suddenly staring at the Count’s broad chest. He also noticed that the Count had the top button of his shirt undone and a peek of golden chest hair was showing. Chest hair was so very … alpha, he thought. When he realized what he was doing he forced himself to look back up at the Count the way he knew a beta would, and said, “All things considered, it’s highly likely I’ll ever forget this place.” After a few seconds of uncomfortable silence Will said, “Well thank you for the book. I’ll cherish it,” he said, getting ready to step around the Count.

“Yes, are you interested in working on a whaling boat?” the Count asked, referring to the book and stopping him in his tracks.

“No, not a whaler,” he said, leaning back against the ladder. “Actually, I am interested in working on a fishing boat, one that I hope to own some day. I’m saving up to buy a boat and I hope to start a small business catching fresh fish, shrimp, crawfish and clams to sell to restaurants and stores back in my home state of Louisiana. I figure two more years of saving and I’ll be able to afford it. That is, if I can land another job when I get back to the States,” he said, looking a bit worried.

“If you’re a fisherman, I’m surprised you took a position on a cruise ship.”

“Well, you take work where you can get it,” he said. "Jobs aren’t always easy to come by. I was lucky to land this job.”

In truth, Will would have preferred working on a fishing boat, but on a fishing boat there’s a higher risk of his status being discovered due to the risk of getting cut on fishing hooks and pikes. Tonic or no tonic, the smell of his blood would have proclaimed him as an omega immediately. When he
bought his fishing boat he would be working independently.

“My father was a fisherman and I used to help him on his boat. He started taking me out with him before I learned to walk,” Will said, smiling at the memory. “In fact,” he said with sudden inspiration, “to repay your kindness, why don’t I see if I can provide the main course for dinner tomorrow? I’m not too keen about going out on the ocean in any kind of rowboat with all the sharks in your waters, but I bet there are crabs living in some of the shallower coves. I’ll go out tomorrow and see if I can find some,” Will said, excited at the thought of doing something he loved, not to mention helping to repay some of the hospitality that the Count had shown him.

“That’s extremely thoughtful of you, Mr. Graham,” the Count said, smiling, and Will almost forgot to breathe when he caught a peek at his canines. He knew had to get out of here right now before the Count picked up on how he was affecting him.

“Well thank you again for the book,” he said, moving off the ladder and stepping sideways, taking a wide berth around the Count and quickly exiting the room.

The Count frowned as he watched Mr. Graham leave the room. There was something about Mr. Graham, something he found … intriguing. He felt a sudden unexpected twinge of remorse at the thought of butchering him for table. But really, no matter how charming a beta was, the only thing they were good for was the meat they provided. And, after all, Mr. Graham had graciously offered to provide the main course for dinner tomorrow. How very appropriate, he thought.

Chapter End Notes

In the next chapter (which is currently around 5,000 words) Will continues to fight his growing attraction toward the Count; the Count tells the story of how he and Randall came to live on the island; and a misunderstanding will lead to dire consequences.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the length of this one, folks, but every time I went through it with the intention of shortening it, it only ended up longer, so I finally gave up! -EA

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will felt a bit off balance after his encounter with the Count, so he took his book and fled up to his room to put some distance between them and decided to stay in his room and read until Abigail came back from her outing with Randall. Putting some distance between himself and the Count would be a good thing. Out of sight, out of mind, right? Then why did his mind keep going back to thoughts of their encounter? He finally realized part of the problem was that the book seemed to be infused with the Count’s scent. The Count had mentioned that *Moby Dick* was a favorite book of his, so he had probably handled the book often.

Will held the book up to his nose and inhaled deeply with his eyes closed. He could imagine the Count holding the book, running his hand over the leather cover, grazing his fingers down the spine, lovingly caressing each page … There, he was doing it again! What was wrong with him!

Several hours later found him sitting in front of his window staring out at nothing, the book abandoned on the nightstand. He had finally given up on it when he’d found himself reading the same paragraphs over and over again. He just couldn’t seem to concentrate. A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts. Hoping it was Abigail he said, “Come in.” But it wasn’t Abigail, it was Abel. “What is it, Abel?”

“The Count wanted me to let you know that lunch is ready, sir.”

“Is Abigail back yet?”

“No, sir, not yet.”

“I’ve got a bit of headache right now. I think I’m going to skip lunch and just lie down for a bit. Please give my apologies to the Count.”

“Of course, sir. Would you like me to send the doctor up?”

“No, that won’t be necessary, Abel. I’m sure with a bit of rest I’ll be right as rain.”

Abel bowed out and closed the door. Will felt like a bit of a coward, but he didn’t want to face the Count again so soon, especially not without Abigail there. Abigail was his anchor, his buffer. She helped keep him grounded. He found her scent soothing amongst all the alpha scents that were starting to affect him like an itch underneath his skin. Thank goodness Abel and Cordell weren’t alphas. Strangely enough, Abel was like Cordell in that he had no scent indicating he had a status at all.

Since he couldn’t concentrate on the book, he decided he would go ahead and lie down. For some strange reason, he felt the need to pile the covers around him and snuggle into them. It was soothing somehow. Surprisingly he fell asleep almost instantly.
When he woke again he noticed the light was dim outside. He must have been asleep for several hours. His stomach was growling now, having missed lunch, and he headed downstairs and saw the Count waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

“Mr. Graham, I was just about to check on you, see if you’re up for a little dinner. How are you feeling?”

“Much better now, Count, thank you. It was just a little headache, nothing serious. I took a nap and I’m fine now.”

“Excellent. Well, go on ahead to the dining room while I gather the others.”

As Will walked into the dining room he noticed the table was set up more elegantly for dinner than it had been for breakfast with fine china, beautiful silverware, and lit candles amidst a centerpiece made up of exotic jungle flowers and leaves. The Count had really outdone himself.

As the others trickled in, Abigail ran up to him looking concerned. “Will, how are you? The Count said you weren’t feeling well.”

“Just a little headache, Abigail, nothing to worry about,” he said, smiling at her reassuringly, glad to see her.”

The Count’s place was at the head of the table, of course, and he held out the chair next to him indicating Bedelia should sit there, then indicated that Jack should sit on his other side. Then he had Abigail sit next to Jack and Randall sit next to Bedelia, and at the far end of the table he indicated Will should sit next to Abigail and Dr. Chilton sit next to Randall, across from Will. Will could understand Dr. Chilton’s placement at the end of the table farthest from the Count, because he could tell the Count often found Dr. Chilton annoying. And while, quite frankly, he was relieved to be placed at the far end of the table and as far away from the alphas as possible, there was this petulant little omega part of him that was starting to wake up that wondered why Miss du Maurier got the seat right next to the Count while he got stuck at the opposite end of the table with Dr. Chilton. He seemed to be feeling more irritable and short tempered now that he was off his tonic, and sitting in such close proximity with three virile alphas wasn’t helping. He felt like his senses were overloading, although Abigail and Miss du Maurier didn’t seem to be bothered by it, but then they had probably interacted with alphas all their life without the benefit of any kind of tonic.

After Hannibal had them all seated to his satisfaction, he disappeared into the kitchen, and then he, Cordell and Abel brought beautifully prepared plates out, setting one in front of each of them. When everyone had a plate the Count then took his position at the head of the table and said “Bon appetite, everyone,” indicating they should begin.

“My, my, this looks delicious,” Jack said, cutting into the meat. “What am I about to put in my mouth?” he asked, holding up a steaming piece of meat on his fork.

“That would be wild boar roasted with wild herbs and fresh mushrooms.”

“Well, he should have run faster,” Jack said, laughing at his own joke.

“Yes, he should have,” Hannibal said, smiling and exchanging a look with his nephew, which, Will was starting to notice, he did quite often, like they were frequently sharing some sort of private joke. “We also have red and yellow beets, and a salad of wild jungle greens with a sweet mango dressing.
“Mmm,” Jack said appreciatively, closing his eyes. “The meat just melts on the tongue.”

“It turns out there are many such pigs on this island,” the Count said. “Actually, Miss du Maurier, we have your two sailors to thank for this meat.”

“What?!” she said, looking up at him in surprise.

“They stopped by earlier today and dropped off this lovely meat, had a bite to eat, gathered a few supplies, and then took off again. Apparently they are enjoying themselves so much they want to spend all their remaining time hunting right up until the time the supply ship arrives,” he said, hoping to alleviate her suspicions.

“I wish I’d seen them,” she said. “I’ve been so worried about them.”

“I believe you were in your room at the time,” he gently admonished.

“Now, see there, they’re perfectly fine and you had nothing to worry about,” Jack told her, taking another bite of the meat and sighing in contentment.

“I suppose I was just being overly concerned,” she said, looking up at Hannibal apologetically.

“Nonsense,” Hannibal said. “It’s an omega’s nature to care about people. Isn’t that right, Miss Hobbs?”

Abigail smiled and nodded shyly.

“How was your outing?” Will asked Abigail, taking a bite of the meat himself.

“Oh, Will, it was just wonderful!” she said, cheeks pink and eyes sparkling. “Randall took me to the most beautiful place in the world. It was just breathtaking,” she said looking over at the young alpha with a fondness that was quite obvious while Randall beamed at the compliment. “And then,” she said, lowering her voice to a whisper, “he held my hand the whole way back.”

Will smiled at her. He could see these two were falling for each other. Whether it was puppy love or something more he didn’t know, but he wondered how Randall was going to handle it when it was time for Abigail to leave the island.

Wondering why a young alpha like Randall would be living on an island alone with just his uncle and two servants, Will remembered that he had started to ask the Count about it this morning in the kitchen but had been interrupted when the captain arrived. “If you don’t mind me asking,” he said, looking between the Count and Randall, “what brought the two of you to live on this island?”

The Count set his fork down and dabbed his lips with his napkin. He picked up his wine and said, “The Lecter family owned a large estate situated on a hundred acres on the most beautiful wooded land on the outskirts of a small village called Kernave in Lithuania. The estate had been in the Lecter family for many generations and had always housed many generations of Lecters simultaneously. I was living there with my uncle Robertos and his wife, my sister Mischa, who was Randall’s mother, and many others. We were all very happy living together.

Randall and I were away on a hunting expedition. You see, his father had died in an unforeseeable accident the previous year and I had promised his mother that I would continue honing his hunting skills, as hunting is a way of life in our family. We would often be gone for weeks at a time during these expeditions. When we returned home this time, however, it was to find the estate burned to the ground. Somehow an unfortunate fire had swept through the estate killing almost everyone, including my beloved sister Mischa. I could have rebuilt, but the
memories associated with it were too painful for myself and for Randall.

“I had heard tales about this island and its abandoned monastery. You see, at one time in the 1800s Spain was contemplating putting a small military outpost on this island. There was a lot of pirate activity going on at that time, and being only 50 miles from the mainland this was an ideal location in which to spot pirate ships lying in wait to pounce on unsuspecting trade ships coming and going from Spain. The Spanish government found out there was a tribe of primitives living on the island, so since Spain is a very religious country, they decided to set up a monastery on the island first so that the priests could begin the process of converting the heathens to Christianity and pave the way for friendly relations when the soldiers arrived later on.

“The natives seemed like friendly, peaceful people, but every now and again one of the monastery builders or one of the priests would simply go missing without a trace. The monastery was nearly complete before the priests found out why. It turns out that the natives were, in fact, cannibals and weren’t interested in being converted to Christianity, or any other religion. Once it was discovered that their missing people had been eaten, one of the priests sent a desperate message to Spain asking for help, and in response to the plea a troop of soldiers was sent to the island, and they ended up wiping out the entire tribe. After that Spain decided it would be bad luck having their soldiers living on an island so tainted. That being the case, there was no need for the religious order to stay, so the monastery was abandoned. Ironic, isn’t it?” Hannibal said, swirling the wine in his glass. “This tribe had probably lived on this island for many generations, perfectly happy with their practices and their beliefs, and then a religious order comes to the island with the intention of converting them to Christianity in order to ‘save’ them, but instead ends up causing their total annihilation.”

“Oh, my, that’s horrible!” Bedelia said with her hand to her bosom, looking slightly pale.

“I purchased the island and had the ruins restored to make a home for myself and my nephew. We needed solitude to heal after what happened, and something about this island called out to me.”

“Well, I hate to say it,” Jack said, “but I’m happy we didn’t end up landing on an island full of cannibals. I mean, it was bad enough I had sharks trying to eat me,” he said chuckling, lightening the mood.

Will frowned as he saw the Count and Randall share another amused look.

“But don’t the two of you get lonely here?” Will asked. “Especially someone as young as Randall having no one here his own age.”

“Now that the monastery has been redesigned to my liking, we anticipate other family members joining us shortly,” Hannibal said. “Isn’t that right, Randall?”

“That’s right, uncle. And I’m very much looking forward to that day,” he said, exchanging a look with his uncle and then smiling over at Abigail, who smiled back at him.

Will frowned. He was getting strange, mixed messages from the two men, as if all their words held double meanings.

“Well, I don’t know what we would have done if you hadn’t been here,” Dr. Chilton spoke up. “We would probably be living in the jungle like savages, but instead we’re sitting at this fine table eating like kings and drinking this superior wine. I’d like to propose a toast,” he said, standing and raising his glass. “To Count Lecter and Randall Tier. May you both find true happiness on this island of yours surrounded by the love of friends and family.”
“Here-here,” Jack said, raising his glass as well.

They all drank to the toast, then resumed eating.

“What do you think of the meat, Mr. Graham?” the Count asked him suddenly.

“It’s excellent,” Will said. “Although I kind of thought wild boar would taste like pork, but this has a rather unique flavor.”

“What do you think it tastes like?” Hannibal asked, curious, since the meat wasn’t boar at all, although it had in actuality been provided by the two sailors.

“I’m not sure,” Will said frowning. “I don’t think I’ve ever tasted anything quite like it.”

“It’s probably the seasonings,” Hannibal replied, smiling. “Seasonings can alter the taste of any dish entirely.” It would seem Mr. Graham has quite the palette, Hannibal thought.

As lively conversation continued around the table, Will found himself tuning it out while he watched the Count. The Count seemed to be paying a great deal of attention to Miss du Maurier this evening, even openly flirting with her a bit, and Will feel a twinge of jealousy, that petulant omega part of him making itself known again. He found himself watching the Count’s hands as he cut his food. He had a thing about hands, and the Count had long-fingered, elegant hands. He watched as the Count brought his fork up to his mouth and closed his lips around it, the tips of his canines peeking out. He had noticed the Count had larger than normal canines. His memory flashed back to a conversation he once heard during lunch in his senior year of high school.

It was a summer day and he was sitting outside at one of the picnic tables eating alone, as he usually did, and reading. The table next to him was filled with a group of omega girls from ‘the wrong side of the tracks.’ These were omegas who snuck cigarettes behind the school, caused trouble in class, and who had ‘reputations.’ In other words, the kind most of the other kids gave a wide berth to and figured would end up pregnant their next heat. Anyway, these omegas had gotten into a ribald conversation about size that had Will listening in with rapt fascination. One of the omegas, a girl named Roxanne Kuhns, who already had the reputation of being with half the football team, said “You can tell if an alpha is well endowed by the size of his canines. The bigger the fangs, the bigger his thing.” All the other omegas had giggled behind their hands at this piece of forbidden information. To this day although Will couldn’t remember what Roxanne looked like, he never forgot what she said. Now, looking at the Count and his larger than normal canines, he wondered if what Roxanne Kuhns said was true. If so, that would mean the Count had a really big …

Will felt a poke in his side.

He looked over at Abigail. Apparently she had just elbowed him. “What?” he whispered.

She put her napkin in front of her mouth and said, “Whatever you’re doing, stop it. I can smell you. You smell like an omega.”

Will’s eyes widened in surprise. Holy cow, he’d been sitting here thinking about the Count’s … thinking about the Count, and his body was picking up on the attraction and unwittingly letting off pheromones meant to attract him.

Getting up quickly, he excused himself and fled the room, staying as far away from the alphas as he could. He charged up to his room and gave himself a quick wipe down with a washcloth and the scented soap, laying the washcloth on the back of his overly warm neck for a few seconds; then
applied his scent blocker. He should have reapplied it after his nap but he’d forgotten, which was extremely careless of him. He put on a fresh shirt that looked like the one he had been wearing so as not to cause speculation, took a few deep breaths and got himself under control, and went back downstairs. Sitting back down next to Abigail he looked at her with a raised eyebrow and she nodded. Good, she couldn’t smell him any longer.

Count Lecter had kept up his conversation with Jack and Bedelia but he had noticed the strange exchange between Mr. Graham and Miss Hobbs. There was something going on between those two.

* * * * *

After dinner they all retired to the drawing room. Dr. Chilton predictably made a beeline for the Count’s liquor cabinet. Will was too antsy to sit down so he circled the room looking at the Count’s collection of mounted heads.

“I see you are admiring my trophies,” Hannibal said, walking up next to him.

Will wasn’t exactly admiring them, but he didn’t correct the Count. Discretely putting some distance between them he said, “You’re quite the skilled hunter.”

“Hunting and cooking are my two passions,” Hannibal said.

“And it’s obvious that you’re very good at both,” Will said, “but I wouldn’t think there would be anything challenging on this island for you to hunt, especially since I see you’ve hunted lions and tigers and bears.”

“You might be surprised,” Hannibal said, a slight curve to his lips. “There’s more dangerous game on this island than you might imagine.”

“He has a trophy room downstairs with his more rare, exotic trophies,” Dr. Chilton spoke up. “But he won’t let you see it unless you go hunting with him.”

“I keep it as a surprise for my guests against the rainy day of boredom. Perhaps I can talk you into going hunting with me, Mr. Graham.”

“I don’t think I could kill anything warm blooded,” Will said. “Fish and crustaceans are about the extent of my hunting skills, I’m afraid.”

“Well, I’ll go hunting with you anytime, Count,” Dr. Chilton spoke up, walking up to him and patting the Count on his shoulder, a full glass of vodka in his hand.

“We’ll see,” the Count said frowning, looking away from the man, annoyance on his face. “Let’s change the subject, shall we?”

“Change the subject. Oh, I know! Play the harpsicord for us,” Dr. Chilton said.

“If you wish,” the Count said, moving toward the harpsicord. “What would you suggest?”

“Just a good tune. Nothing highbrow like last time, just a good tune.”

“I see,” he said. “Well, let me see if I can accommodate you.”

Count Lecter sat at a beautiful instrument that Will was unfamiliar with and started playing a lively piece while Dr. Chilton stood next to him, watching him play. Jack was sitting on the couch by
the fireplace, Miss du Maurier was standing by the fireplace looking like something was on her mind, while Abigail and Randall were standing in the corner close together speaking in low tones. Will went and sat in the chair across from Jack and listened to the complex piece the Count was playing. He was a very skilled player. Apparently he was good at everything.

“I need to excuse myself for a moment,” Randall said, bowing to Abigail and the others and walking out of the room.

As soon as Randall left, Bedelia headed over and sat next to Jack, who looked at her with mild surprise.

“Captain, remember at breakfast the Count saying their boat was in need of repair? Well, that isn’t true. I heard it leave the boathouse last night. It returned this morning.”

“You mean you think he's keeping us from returning to the mainland?” Jack asked.

“Yes.”

“Well, perhaps he's just lonely and is enjoying having company around for a few days.”

“Perhaps. But I haven’t seen two of our people for almost two days now.”

“But the Count said he saw them just this morning,” Abigail spoke up, having come to stand next to Will.

“She doesn’t believe it,” Will said, leaning forward, picking up on Miss du Maurier’s worry. “What do you think happened to your two sailors?” Will asked.

“I’m not sure, but three nights ago after dinner the Count took our two sailors down to see his trophy room...through that large steel door in the entry room. I’ve seen neither of them since.”

“Have you tried to go down there, see this trophy room for yourself?” Will asked.

“I was going to once when I knew he was out, but he keeps the door locked and I don’t know where he keeps the key.”

“Look here, you’re not telling me you suspect foul play!” Jack said incredulously.

“Oh, be careful, he’s watching us,” Bedelia said nervously. “Will you smile as if I’d said something amusing?”

Jack faked a chuckle. “Now look here, you must be mistaken. The Count has been a kind and gracious host to us all.”

“Not now. Applaud,” she said as the music came to an end and she stood up and clapped. “That was wonderful, Count,” she enthused.

“Attaboy!” Dr. Chilton said, patting the Count on the back.

“Thank you,” he said, but Will could see his eyes sweeping over them with suspicion.

“What did I tell you? Smacks a mean ivory, eh, Miss Hobbs?”

“It was wonderful,” she said, smiling stiffly at the Count.

Will could see that Miss du Maurier’s concerns were making Abigail anxious.
“Don’t stop, Count, please,” Miss du Maurier begged.

“I’m afraid we have failed to hold the full attention of our audience,” the Count replied, looking at her pointedly.

“Well, I expect it’s hard to concentrate after everything they’ve been through,” she said.

“My dear lady, you are pleading for yourself. I can see the drooping of those lovely eyes. I will have Abel turn down your bed,” he said, pulling on the bell pull.

You know, the Count’s worse than a family governess. Every night he sends us off to bed like naughty children.”

“Oh, no, my dear. No. Charming children,” he said, coming up to her and kissing her hand.

Will saw Miss du Maurier stiffen slightly in response to the Count’s touch. He could tell she really thought there was something untoward going on here. He wondered if Miss du Maurier’s fears had merit. The Count’s story at dinner about why he and his nephew came to be living on the island alone had made sense, but yet he had felt that the story was sugarcoated somehow, that it wasn’t the full truth.

“Well, I guess I’ll turn in too,” Jack said. “I’m all done in.”

Randall returned at that moment. “Oh, is everyone retiring already?”

“Now, Randall, they need their rest after what they’ve all been through. We’ll see them in the morning,” the Count said.

* * * * *

Despite his nap Will was tired, but when he went to bed he tossed and turned. What Miss du Maurier said kept going through his head. Was the Count keeping them here on the island for some reason? Was it loneliness that prompted him to lie about the boat so that they would stay a few more days, or something else? He had to admit the deception about the boat made him uneasy. And his growing attraction to the Count was also making him uneasy. He couldn’t let his status be discovered. He needed to keep Jack in the dark so he would be ensured of getting a good recommendation that would ensure another position once he returned back home.

After a good hour of tossing and turning, Will finally fell into a restless sleep and he dreamed. And oh what a dream it was. He couldn’t remember ever having had a heart pounding erotic dream like he was currently having. He griped the sheets and moaned as his dream lover climbed on top of him. He panted and spread his legs wider as Count Lecter slowly entered his body.

Down the hall Hannibal was also dreaming, and it was also a good dream. In his dream he had his eyes closed, better to savor the sensations coursing through him as he started thrusting slowly in and out of a body that was encasing him like warm liquid velvet. He smiled as he heard soft moans and gasps coming from below him and knew that his partner was equally enjoying herself. Hannibal was somewhat aware that he was dreaming, but he knew this was no ordinary dream. It was too vivid, too realistic. Although rare, he had heard tell some members of the Lecter bloodline experienced something called dream-sharing, but he had only ever heard of that happening between mates with a strong bond. Considering he wasn’t even mated yet, this must be a sign that he and Miss du Maurier were meant to be together. How else could they have such a strong connection like this to dream share?

In the dream he smiled as he opened his eyes and looked down, expecting to see soft golden hair
fanned across the pillow and clear blue eyes looking up at him, and he froze when instead his eyes were met with satiny chocolate curls and stormy blue-green eyes half lidded and blown wide with lust. *Don’t stop*, Will Graham said, running a hand up his arm, ankles wrapping themselves below his hips and urging him on. *Please don’t stop*, he begged in that soft voice of his, looking up at him pleadingly through those thick lashes of his.

Hannibal was in shock. Why on earth was he dream-sharing with a male beta? He shouldn’t be dream-sharing with a beta, period, much less a man. And why was he dreaming he was having intimate relations with one? It just wasn’t right. Since he knew dream-sharing was a trait that ran in the Lecter line, that meant he had initiated the dream connection with Mr. Graham, but why? How?

Although his mental dream self was in a state of confusion, his physical dream self, which was currently buried to the hilt in a warm, tight body, was highly aroused and had no such qualms about betas or men, it just wanted satisfaction as it had been a long time since the Count had been with anyone. And this was only a dream after all, not reality. He couldn’t deny he had been enjoying it thoroughly when he thought it was Miss du Maurier writhing beneath him. And Mr. Graham certainly didn’t seem to be having issue with the contents of his dream, although he would have no idea that this was a shared dream and that Hannibal was now manipulating the dream.

Hannibal swallowed and tentatively started moving again, and Mr. Graham threw his head back on the pillow in response and arched his back like a contented cat making the most satisfying little noises. The sight of the pale smooth skin of his throat only excited Hannibal further. He remembered seeing that throat on display when Mr. Graham was in the bath, and he was not unaffected by it. Maybe that’s what had prompted the dream. He increased tempo, thrusting faster and harder while burying his face in the crook of the man’s neck and sucking the tender flesh there. Mr. Graham cried out and bucked under him like an unbroken horse, pulling at his arms and urging him on. This wasn’t some fragile little omega he had to be gentle with so he didn’t hold back. He pounded forcefully into the body below him, punishing him for putting him in this position, but the man seemed to revel in the abuse as he arched under him and clawed at his back meeting him thrust for thrust. The Count felt the familiar tightening in his groin growing and threw his head back, his release eminent now … and then the connection was suddenly severed. He bolted upright in bed gasping, his heart pounding. He was trembling and covered in sweat, still highly aroused as he was robbed of his climax. Frustrated, he threw off his covers and looked down at the wet spot on the front of his sleep pants and at the bulge straining against them. Why had the connection broken so suddenly and at such an inopportune moment? Then he heard what sounded like soft knocking down the hallway.

He got up and put on his robe, cringing when it brushed against the front of his pants. He moved to the door and opened it a crack. His room was at the end of the hallway so he could see all the other doors down the hall. He was surprised to see Miss Hobbs knocking on Mr. Graham’s door looking anxious. That’s what had broken the connection; she had woken Mr. Graham up. Curious, he watched to see what she was doing knocking on his door in the middle of the night. The door open a crack and he heard her say, “Will…,” but the rest of her words were muffled. Mr. Graham’s door opened then and Miss Hobbs slipped in, and the door closed behind her.

“Abigail, what is it?” Will asked, shutting the door behind her and trying to keep his voice calm when he felt like snapping at her because he was so incredibly frustrated right now. He had been having the most incredible erotic dream of his entire life but had been robbed of its blissful conclusion, and he was feeling on edge right now. He rubbed his neck, still feeling the ghosting of lips on his skin. The dream had felt so real.
“I’m sorry, Will,” she said, twisting her hands together and pacing, “but I couldn’t sleep. What Miss du Maurier said kept going through my head and every noise I heard I imagined someone coming to take one of us away and drag us down into that basement so that we disappeared too. Do you think she’s right, that something sinister is happening here? I like the Count and Randall, but I know from experience that good people can do bad things.”

Will looked at her curiously, but now wasn’t the time to ask about that last comment. “I don’t know. It does seem kind of odd that no one but the Count has seen those two sailors for two days.”

“What do you think is down in that basement?” she asked, looking frightened. “Maybe he took them down there and murdered them.”

“But what reason would he have for killing two total strangers? It might answer a few questions if we could get into the basement and get a peek at this mysterious trophy room of his, but Miss du Maurier says he keeps the door locked. If we could find out where he keeps the key, maybe we could sneak down there with the captain and take a look,” he said, rubbing his eyes. “What is it?” he asked, when she was looking at him strangely.

“It’s just you really smell like an omega tonight. Your scent is really strong and sweet.”

“Yeah, well the longer I go without my tonic, the more I’m going to have trouble disguising my scent,” he said blushing, knowing why his scent was so strong right now. It was that blasted dream.

She nodded her head. “Would you mind if I slept in here with you? I’m frightened to be alone.”

“Abigail, what if someone sees? Your reputation would be ruined.”

“I’m not worried about that. With my parents dead I’m the sole heir to my father’s silver mine. I’m wealthy and independent and anyone who doesn’t like what I do can just stuff it. In fact, you could come live with me. I don’t care that you’re a male omega. If you lived with me you wouldn’t have to worry about getting a job because I have more than enough money for both of us.”

“That’s kind of you, Abigail, but despite being an omega I’m still a man, and it doesn’t sit right with me living off of someone. I need to make my own way in the world, as hard as it is with my … disability. I just wish I wasn’t discriminated against.” Will looked at her and sighed then. “But if you’re frightened you can stay here with me.”

“Goody!” she said smiling, and running and jumping in the bed.

As Will headed back to bed he couldn’t help wishing that Abigail had delayed knocking on his door for just a couple more minutes. Still, he couldn’t begrudge her. She was his friend and she was frightened, and it was nice having a friend he could talk openly with. He’d never had that before. He got in bed next to her and they talked and talked half the night until they both fell into an exhausted sleep.

Hannibal had stood at his door watching and waiting for Miss Hobbs to re-emerge. There must be a logical reason why the young omega would visit the bedchambers of a male beta in the middle of the night. Five minutes passed, and then ten. Hannibal felt his arousal flagging and his temper climbing. Why hadn’t he seen it before? It was all so clear now. Miss Hobbs and Mr. Graham
were lovers. That explained so much. It explained why Mr. Graham had fought so hard to save Miss Hobbs above all others when the ship went down. It explained why there seemed to be a closeness between them. He noticed they even called each other by their first names despite the fact she had been a guest on the ship and he had been but a steward. They had probably been carrying on an affair aboard the ship.

Incensed, he closed the door and went to the sideboard and poured himself a stiff drink. He was usually such a good judge of character, but he had erred in this case. His nephew would be devastated. They had both thought that Miss Hobbs was a perfect match for him. But clearly he couldn’t let his nephew bond with a woman of such loose moral character, although Mr. Graham was probably to blame. Abigail might even now be carrying his child. Mr. Graham had no doubt seduced the naïve Miss Hobbs with his good looks and soft, sultry voice. Well, it was good they found this out before mistakes were made. Now that he knew, there was no use keeping either of them around. Miss Hobbs and Mr. Graham needed to be eliminated, and the sooner the better.

The Count sat in the chair by the fire fuming and tapping his foot in agitation. His nephew had been begging him to go on a solo hunt as a test of his manhood, and it was time. After he informed Randall of how Miss Hobbs had been playing him the fool, acting like she liked him during the day but then slipping into Mr. Graham’s bed at night, his nephew should have no problem killing her and Mr. Graham both.

He drained his glass in one gulp. Now that a decision had been made, he headed back to bed. He didn’t know why, but he felt extreme disappointment in Mr. Graham, as if the man had betrayed him somehow. Yes, the sooner they both died, the sooner he and his nephew could forget the two of them and put this whole unfortunate matter behind them. And while Randall was out hunting them he would proceed with his plans to make Miss du Maurier his mate. It was time to stop procrastinating and move things along.

He closed his eyes, but sleep would not come. Curse you, Will Graham, he thought. Why did you have to wash up on my island? He laid in bed and made his plans for the morrow, the last day that Mr. Graham and Miss Hobbs would draw breath upon this earth.

Chapter End Notes

In the next chapter things take a turn for the worse for Will and Abigail, and it looks like they may get to see that mysterious trophy room.
We're a little over the halfway point. Thanks for your continued support. Your comments really had me smiling last chapter, so keep 'em coming!

Despite how late Will had gotten to sleep, he still managed to wake up at his usual time. He smiled sleepily as he realized that Abigail was snuggled up next to him. He shook her awake and told her she needed to get back to her own room before the rest of the household woke up. She might not care about her reputation, but he did. He looked both ways out his door to make sure the coast was clear before shooing her out the door, and he kept watch, making sure she made it to her room unnoticed. After that he grabbed some fresh clothes and went down to the beach. He would need a full body bath in the salt water to wash away all traces of his scent after that dream last night, and the salt coating his skin would also help mute his scent, although it would dry his skin out. Checking the vial of his scent neutralizer that he kept in his pocket, he only had about an inch left, so he would need to use it sparingly to make it last the next three days until the supply ship arrived. He still hadn’t had an opportunity to check the kitchen for the ingredients he needed as the Count spent a great deal of time in there.

During breakfast Will couldn’t help but notice that something had changed. There was a palatable tension in the air, and the happy, relaxed conversation at dinner the night before was replaced with a tense silence and stilted attempts at conversation. Will noticed that Randall was sitting next to his uncle this morning in Jack’s place, not across from Abigail, and he seemed to be ignoring her attempts at conversation, which was odd. Abigail shared a look with him and he could see the confusion and hurt on her face. The Count, on the other hand, seemed to be focusing most of his attention on Miss du Maurier this morning, telling her how lovely she looked and trying to coax her into conversation, and as Will watched, he felt a stab of jealousy at the fact that Miss du Maurier could easily have what he desired but could not have, and that that wonderful dream he’d experienced last night was just that, just a dream that could never become a reality, not for someone like him.

Despite the Captain’s best attempts to lighten the atmosphere, even he failed, and he looked around the table in bewilderment.

After breakfast Will asked Abigail if she’d like to take a walk on the beach. In truth, the sudden coldness of the Count and his nephew was worrying and he wanted to get out of the house and puzzle it out.

Their departure together did not go unnoticed.

The Count watched Will and Abigail exit the house, and as he looked over at Randall, who had also noticed them leaving together, he saw anger and betrayal on his nephew’s face. Bedelia had excused herself right after breakfast and headed for her room citing a headache. Hannibal frowned in frustration at the departing woman as it seemed that his increased attentions at breakfast had not gained him any ground; and, in fact, only seemed to make the omega more uncomfortable. Dr.
Chilton had yet to make an appearance, as he was rarely up before noon. However, all this actually fell into the Count’s plans quite nicely. With last night’s discovery it was time to move things along, but he needed to take the alpha out of play first. The Captain posed the biggest danger and needed to be neutralized before he could see to the elimination of Mr. Graham and Miss Hobbs. He had a few quick words with his nephew and then approached the captain.

“Captain, since the others seem to have deserted us, I thought that perhaps I might invite you to see my trophy room. Then, if you’d like to accompany me, we can go out and see if we can find Miss du Maurier’s two wayward sailors and bring them back. Miss du Maurier seems to be a worrisome creature of a delicate nature and I can see that she won’t fully relax until she sees for herself that they are in good health, and I would certainly enjoy your company while we search. I could give you a tour of the island as well.”

“Why thank you, Count,” Jack said, looking pleased and thinking that it would be good if they could finally put Miss du Maurier’s unfounded fears and suspicions to rest. Her worries seemed to be affecting everyone, if the uncomfortable atmosphere at breakfast was any indication. “I know their absence has caused her unnecessary worry, and I admit I would really like to have a few words with the first mate about what happened right before their ship went down.”

“Well, then, it’s settled. After I show you my trophy room we’ll head out straightaway so that we can find them and encourage them to come back to the house long enough to alleviate her worry, and you can have your chat.”

Hannibal walked into the entry room to a beautiful round mahogany table with a vase of tropical flowers sitting in the center of it and pulled a large brass key out of a small hidden drawer; then walked to the large steel door and unlocked it. He lit the candles of a candelabra and handed it to Jack. “It’s a bit dark down there. After you,” he said. “And mind the steps; they can be a bit damp and slippery.”

Jack headed down first, walking carefully. Miss du Maurier’s suspicions did flash through his mind briefly, but he quickly dismissed them. Miss du Maurier was just allowing her overactive imagination to run away with her. The Count had bent over backwards to accommodate them all. He had been a perfect gentleman and a gracious host. They would find the two sailors and bring them back and show her and the others that her worries were unfounded.

Hannibal quickly followed Jack down the stairs, shutting the door behind him. Randall and Cordell would already be lying in wait in the trophy room to help him subdue the captain.

* * * * *

Will and Abigail strolled along the beach, each deep in their own thoughts.

“Did you and Randall have an argument this morning?” he finally asked. “I noticed he was acting strange at breakfast.”

“No, we didn’t. And I was wondering about that myself. And the Count seemed to be acting strange as well. I could swear he was ignoring us.”

“Yes, I noticed that too,” Will said worriedly. “Perhaps he’s upset because he saw Miss du Maurier speaking with us all last night while he was playing the harpsicord and suspected that we were buying into her suspicions.”

“Maybe. But the Count wasn’t ignoring her. Or the Captain for that matter. I feel as if something has changed, but for the life of me I don’t know what it could be.”
They stayed outside walking the beach and just talking for well over an hour. Will had a strange growing feeling of foreboding he couldn’t shake and he was reluctant to go back.

“Well, when we do get back,” he finally said, “why don’t you just have a talk with Randall, ask him straight out what’s wrong,” Will suggested. “I’ll find the captain and see if he can shed any light on what’s going on. I don’t think I can take another meal as tense as the one this morning.”

“That’s a good idea. It’s probably nothing,” she said.

As they headed back to the house, still walking along the beachfront, Will stopped and made Abigail turn her back while he stripped off his shirt and freshened up by splashing his upper body and neck with salt water, just as a precaution. He had been careless last night at dinner and he didn’t want a repeat. After that, they headed back.

When they entered the house, it was strangely quiet. Will spotted Abel and asked, “Do you know where everyone is?”

“I believe the Count and Master Randall went out looking for those two missing sailors.”

“Oh. Well that’s good,” Will said. “And have you seen the Captain?”

“I believe the Captain accompanied them.”

“Oh,” Will said, exchanging a worried look with Abigail. “And Miss du Maurier?”

“She is in her room.”

Will nodded. He didn’t feel the need to ask about Dr. Chilton. “Well, let’s hope they find them quickly,” he said, giving Abel a smile.

“Indeed, sir,” Abel said, bowing and walking away.

“I’m sure the Captain’s fine,” Will said to Abigail, voicing her unspoken concern and trying to reassure himself as much as her.

“What if the Count took him down to the basement to see his trophy room and Abel is lying?” Abigail whispered. “He could be down there right now at the Count’s mercy,” she said, pointing toward the steel door.

“The Captain is no alpha to be trifled with,” Will said.

“Yes, but what if he did take him down there and managed to overpower him?”

“Yes, but for what purpose?” Will said, facing her, looking frustrated. “The Count likes the Captain, I can tell.”

“Yes, and I thought Randall liked me. Now I’m not so sure. I just wish we knew what was down there,” she said, looking over at the door and then freezing. The door to the basement was open a couple of inches. “Will, the door is open!” she whispered, wide eyed. “If they are all out looking for the sailors, we can take a quick look around.”

“And what if the Count is down there with the Captain?” Will asked, swallowing.

“Then the Captain may need our help. We need weapons,” she said, walking in the drawing room to the fireplace and grabbing a poker and handing it to Will. She grabbed a candlestick from the mantle above the fireplace and removed the candle, gripping the candlestick like a club. “But we
need to know what’s going on here one way or another.”

“All right, but maybe I should go alone,” Will said. “I’m sure it’s nothing, but just in case maybe you should stay up here.”

“And what if you don’t come back? No, I couldn’t bear it. I’m not going to let you go down there by yourself. If there is trouble, you’ll need my help.”

Will admitted to himself that he really didn’t want to go down there alone. “Okay, but let’s be quick about this so we’re not caught.” Will lit the candle that Abigail had removed from the candlestick and headed down the stairs, Abigail right on his heels.

They didn’t notice that Abel had been watching them, nor the smile that crossed his face when they disappeared through the door. He hurried off to let the Count know that his plan had worked.

Chapter End Notes

In the next chapter Will and Abigail get a look at the mysterious trophy room … and really wish they hadn’t!
“Tread carefully,” Will whispered, feeling the slight dampness on the stone stairs as he descended into the dark basement.

“I’m frightened, Will,” Abigail whispered.

“I know. I’m frightened too, but Miss du Maurier’s suspicions are eating away at the both of us and we need to know if there’s any basis to them. And if the Captain is down here and in trouble, we need to try and help him.”

“But what chance will two omegas have against an alpha?”

“I don’t know, Abigail. But if something happens to the Captain, who would appear to be the only alpha on our side, what chance will we have of dealing with whatever this is alone? No, if he’s in trouble we have to try and help him, for our sakes as well as his.”

When they reached the bottom of the stairs it was pitch black. They stood still for a moment and listened for any signs of talking, or possibly a struggle, but the silence was almost deafening. Feeling a bit reassured by the silence, they walked through the dark toward the only light source, which would probably be the Count’s mysterious trophy room. There was a scent in the air that was making Will feel edgy. It smelled like a combination of mildew and old pennies and a strange chemical smell he couldn’t identify. He wondered then if the Count did his own taxidermy work down here in order to mount and display his kills. If he did, Will hoped they weren’t going to see any disturbing dead things lying about down here. And, quite frankly, he had seen more than enough of the Count’s trophies scattered throughout the house. Why someone would feel pride at the fact they liked killing things and put them on display was beyond him. Everywhere he went in this house he felt the eyes of the dead following him in what felt like rebuke or warning.

They slowly neared the room with the light, and Will went through the open doorway first … then stopped so suddenly that Abigail bumped into him. “Oh my god!” he stammered, shaking his head in disbelief as he looked around the room, terror climbing up his throat. “Don’t look, Abigail!” he said, turning around and trying to shield her from seeing, wishing that he could un-see what he just saw.

“What? What is it?” she asked, dreading to know but peeking around him nonetheless with the need to know. She jerked back and screamed, dropping the candlestick and clasping her hands over her mouth in horror.

There were heads mounted all around this room as well, but these weren’t animal heads. These were the heads of people. The reality of it struck Will. The Count was hunting people. He was actually hunting people like animals and killing them and then mounting their heads like trophies. He spotted two heads floating in large glass jars in some sort of fluid, and suspected that they were
the heads of Miss du Maurier’s two missing sailors. Then the pieces came together in his mind. The Count lived on this island with just his nephew and two servants. The Count liked hunting people, but there were no people on this island to hunt except the ones that came from shipwrecks. The Captain had suspected that the signal lights had somehow shifted, but Will now suspected that the Count had shifted those signal lights intentionally for the purpose of sinking ships so that he could hunt the survivors on this island of his. And Randall would have known what his uncle was doing, probably even participated in the hunts as well! They were in grave danger! They needed to get out of here!

“Will!”

Will turned and spotted a large cage with heavy bars sitting in a shadowed corner on one side of the room, and in it was the captain. He felt a huge amount of relief seeing the alpha alive.

“Captain!” he said, running to the cage, setting down the fireplace poker while looking around frantically for the key to unlock it. “Where’s the key?” he asked desperately, looking at the Captain, who seemed a little unsteady on his feet, like he had been drugged or something.

“Don’t worry about me, Will. Just get out of here! Get out now! Don’t let them find you here. Will, they’re not what they appear. They’re …”

“Well, well, well, what have we here?” Count Lecter said, appearing suddenly behind them, startling them all. Will pressed his back to Jack’s cage, and Abigail grabbed onto his arm with trembling hands, whimpering, utterly terrified.

“Will, they’re monsters!” Jack said. And Will agreed. Anyone who killed people and mounted their heads on the wall could definitely be classified as a monster.

“Tsk-tsk-tsk, Captain. Didn’t your mother ever tell you that name calling is rude?” Hannibal said conversationally, as Randall came to stand next to his uncle. Looking between Will and Abigail Hannibal said, “I’m sure you’ve both heard the expression ‘curiosity killed the cat’.”

“Why?” Will asked, voice shaking. “Why would you kill all these people?”

“The answer to that lies in what I am and who my family is, Mr. Graham. You’ll recall the story I told of why Randall and I came to this island?”

Will nodded.

“I’m afraid I gave you a slightly altered version of the truth. Let me set the record straight right now. The Lecter family is one of the last remaining wendigo bloodlines.”

“What does wen-di-go mean?” Will asked frowning, the word sounding foreign on his tongue.

“You really don’t want to know, Will,” Jack said behind him, sounding upset.

“Wendigos are a race of hunters; a race of cannibals.”

“Ca…cannibals?” Will said incredulously. Then he shook his head. “If this is some kind of sick joke …”

“I can assure you, Mr. Graham, this is no joke. The Lecter family lived in peace and harmony on the outskirts of the Village of Kernave for many generations. You see, the villagers knew what we were, but we had an understanding. We would never hunt anyone within the village, and conversely we would protect the village by eliminating gypsies, thieves, beggars, bandits or
soldiers—anyone who sought to enter the village unwanted who might do it harm. It was a symbiotic existence.

“Randall and I were off hunting. As I said, his father had died in an unfortunate accident a year earlier and I had taken it upon myself to see to his more advanced training. Cordell and Abel were accompanying us to help butcher and carry back any meat we caught. We would often have to travel great distances to find fresh meat outside the village and could be gone days, if not weeks at a time, on our hunting expeditions. While we were gone, a young alpha in my family saw a young beta watering his horse in a stream in the woods nearby, and since the beta was a stranger, he killed him. This alpha was still a teen and he acted impulsively because he wanted to impress the family. Unfortunately, the beta he killed turned out to be the mayor’s nephew who was coming to live with him after his parents had died from a fever. But nobody knew that. The mayor hadn’t told us of his nephew’s coming because the boy wasn’t supposed to arrive for another two weeks. Apparently the boy had decided to come early without alerting his uncle to that fact. So an unfortunate mistake was made. When the mayor figured out what happened, that his dead brother’s only child was killed by one of us, he became enraged and ordered the villagers to surround our estate and pour pitch on it and set it aflame. Anyone who tried to escape the flames was killed with guns, arrows, spears or clubs. When Randall and I returned home, our entire family was dead and the estate was a smoldering ruin. Naturally the mayor thought he had killed all of us. Randall and I couldn’t stay there, we knew we had to leave, but before we did we snuck into the mayor’s home and killed him and his family very slowly after discovering what had transpired.”

Will shuddered at the coldness in the Count’s voice.

“As I said, I had heard about this island and I bought it, and Randall and I and our two servants moved here for the solitude it provided while we overcame our grief. The fact that cannibals once lived on this island and were also wiped out for simply being who they were made it seem like it was meant for us. But now that sufficient time has passed, we’re looking to move forward, to expand our family, and once we have sufficient numbers we will go back and rebuild our ancestral home and slaughter anyone who tries to get in our way.”

“W…why are you called wendigoes and not simply cannibals?” Will asked, trying to understand.

“As I said, we’re an ancient race, almost extinct now. It would be hard to explain what we are. I doubt if you would believe me anyway. It’s best if I show you, Mr. Graham,” Hannibal said smiling, and it was not a reassuring smile.

Will watched with perplexed embarrassment as the Count unbuttoned his shirt, revealing a broad, furred chest; then stared in horror as the Count began to change before his eyes. His skin darkened, his chest broadened, antlers grew from his head and claws from his fingertips. His eyes now blazed red with a heated intensity. And when he smiled again, it was with teeth with razor edges and elongated canines. Will was trembling badly now, his legs threatening to give out on him. Only years of habit had him biting his tongue to keep from making any sort of omegan sound. Abigail’s grip on his arm was a painful thing and when he looked at her she was shaking like a leaf and baring her neck and whimpering, tears streaking her face.

“This is a wendigo,” Mr. Graham, the creature said, holding out its arms.

Will was staring at the floor now, utterly terrified, unable to look at the creature. “A…and you and R…Randall and Cordell a…and Abel are all w…wendigoes?” Will asked through chattering teeth.

“Randall and I are. Cordell and Abel are what are referred to as nėra lyties, which in English translates to no gender. Nėra lyties are the resultant offspring of a wendigo and a human breeding.
Unfortunately, some of our family members could not resist the enticing fragrance of female villagers in heat. Néra lyties are born without status—neither alpha nor beta nor omega. They are also born sterile and have no desire for intimate relations. They do, however, share our taste for human flesh, which is why Cordell and Abel ended up coming with us instead of staying with the humans.”

That explained why Cordell and Abel had no scent. Despite himself, Will was glad to have that piece of the puzzle solved.

“Y…you said you’re looking to expand your f…family,” Will said. “How can you do that if there are only the t…two of you?”

“We have the ability to change humans into wendigoes. If we find a human who we believe has exceptional qualities, like the good captain here, there are only two requirements that must be met to change them. One, they have to have consumed human flesh. And two, they have to be bitten by one of us while we’re in our wendigo form.”

“A…and the captain has eaten human f…flesh?” Will asked incredulously.

Hannibal smiled, showing his teeth again. “Oh, Mr. Graham, you all have since the day you arrived.”

Will had to swallow down the bile that was threatening to come up. He saw Abigail put a hand over her mouth as if she was going to be sick.

“And you already b…bit him?”

“A little over an hour ago. It’ll take five days for him to complete the transformation, and then he’ll be one of us.”

Will looked back at the Captain and saw him rubbing his shoulder with an unhappy look on his face.

“S…so what’s going to happen to me and Abigail?” Will asked fearfully, looking at Randall, who was easier to look at in his human form but who had not looked at them once this entire time.

“You’re going to bite us as well?”

“I’m afraid we only keep exceptional individuals, Mr. Graham; ones who will benefit our family,” Hannibal said, eyes burning as he looked between the two of them. The rest are beneficial in their own way, of course,” he added. “Waste not, want not after all,” he said smiling cruelly.

“You mean as food,” Will spat out, feeling as if he had just taken a blow to the gut.

“That’s exactly what I mean, Mr. Graham. Humans deemed unworthy of our family can still benefit us by providing us sustenance.”

“No! Oh, no!” Abigail cried, putting the back of her hand to her mouth. “Randall, please don’t let him do this to us!” When Randall refused to look at her she said, “Randall, I thought you liked me; I thought we were friends! Please don’t let this happen!” she begged, tears flowing freely. “Talk to your uncle. Please stop this!” she cried.

Randall looked up at Abigail then, and there for a second Will saw indecision on his face and felt a flicker of hope, but then Randall shared a look with his uncle and his face hardened. “I’m sorry, Abigail, but you’re not the person I thought you were,” Randall said, and although he was back to looking at the floor, Will thought that he looked upset.
“I don’t understand!” she sobbed. “What did I do to make you hate me?”

Randall glanced back up at Abigail, eyes flicking briefly to where she was holding onto Will’s arm, and said coldly, “I think you know the answer to that.”

Will and Abigail exchanged a confused look.

“Randall, please tell me why …”

“Enough!” the Count said, cutting her off. “The decision has been made. And it will not be I who will be hunting you, it will be Randall. He has been wanting to go on his first solo hunt, so I think the two of you will suffice for his first time, though I doubt you’ll prove to be much of a challenge,” he sneered. “You’ll be given a two hour head start and then Randall will come after you.”

“Randall,” Will tried, “you’re actually going to kill Abigail?” he said in disbelief.

But Randall was back to looking at the ground and ignoring them.

“Can we at least have a weapon to defend ourselves?” Will asked, feeling desperate, but also feeling his anger climbing. How was he to fight against such a creature?

“I’ve always thought that the mind is the best weapon, Mr. Graham. Let’s see how yours stacks up. Cordell tells me you carry a pocket knife around with you. That can be your weapon,” he said with a smile that did not touch his eyes.

Will felt his anger climb further. “A pocket knife against that!” he said with a raised voice, pointing at Hannibal’s antlers.

Hannibal stopped smiling and his eyes blazed. “I’m not going to risk injury to my only living relative over the likes of you two,” he said, voice tinged with loathing.

Will flinched at the venom in the Count’s voice and resisted the impulse to bare his neck while wondering once again what had caused this sudden hatred toward them. He blinked back his tears. He would not let them see him cry. He was an omega but he had his pride. He admitted he had allowed himself to develop feelings for the Count and thought the Count had at least liked him, but he realized now he had been sorely mistaken. The Count and Randall were just toying with the two of them while secretly picturing all the ways they would kill them and cook them up to be served to other poor unsuspecting fools. You’re so stupid, Will, thinking he liked you, he thought.

“What if Randall can’t catch us?” Will asked, glancing over at the young man in question, who continued to ignore them.

“We’re on an island, Mr. Graham. There’s nowhere for you to go and he has all the time in the world.”

Will looked up and met Hannibal’s eyes then, something extremely difficult for an omega to do when frightened, especially when those eyes are in a face that looks like the devil himself, but he was beyond furious now and he let his anger burn bright. Anger was better than fear. If he let the fear take over it would consume him and he would end up groveling on the ground at the Count’s feet, whining and baring his neck like every instinct in his body was screaming for him to do. Not that it would do any good. Abigail was an omega clearly in distress and the Count wasn’t taking pity on her. No, all it would do was earn him looks of disgust on both … make that all three alphas’ faces. He couldn’t bear that humiliation on top of everything else. “And what if we kill him?” Will finally asked, matching the Count’s coldness so that even Randall looked up at him in
Hannibal smiled despite himself, admiring the beta’s moxie standing up to him like this, and then for some unknown reason scenes from the dream last night flashed through his mind and he stiffened, the smile leaving his face. “In the unlikely event that you are able to kill my beloved sister’s only child …” he said menacingly, “… then I’ll take it upon myself to personally come after you, and I promise you I won’t give you the quick death that I’m sure he's planning to give you. Now, enough talk. I’m tired of looking at the two of you.”

Hannibal opened a door in the basement leading out into the jungle and tilted his antlers toward it, dismissing them. “Remember, you have two hours.”

Will grabbed Abigail’s hand and pulled the poor sobbing girl out the door behind him. Hannibal closed the door and looked over at his nephew.

“I’m going to wait in my room until it’s time,” Randall said dully, leaving the basement, shoulders hunched. Hannibal could smell the unhappiness and anxiety rolling off him and again cursed Mr. Graham as the cause of it.

“You’re a monster,” Jack spat out, gripping the bars of his cage.

“Oh, I am, Captain,” Hannibal said, watching his nephew leave. “And in five days’ time, you will be too.

Chapter End Notes

In the next chapter the hunt begins. An unhappy Randall hunts what he thinks will be easy prey … but this is Will we’re talking about! ;)
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

All right, on with the hunt!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will held on to Abigail’s hand as he pulled her through the jungle. He was fifty percent frightened and fifty percent angry, and he decided he would focus on the anger because that just might help them survive.

He looked behind him at Abigail and felt his anger grow hotter. She was sobbing openly, tears streaming down her face. He knew she had developed feelings for Randall, and he had really thought Randall had feelings for her as well. This had been a crushing blow for her. He didn’t really understand what had just happened back there, but he knew that Abigail hadn’t deserved it.

Will stopped abruptly and grabbed hold of Abigail’s upper arms. “Listen, this isn’t over yet. There are two of us and only Randall will be coming after us, and he’s young and his uncle said he’s never hunted alone before, which may give us an advantage. If Randall and the Count think we’re going to be easy prey, they’ve got another thing coming. We’re going to beat this and we’re going to live, but it’s going to take both of us working together. I need your help if we’re going to make it through this. We survived a shipwreck and sharks, and by god we’re going to survive this, Abigail. Do you believe me?” he asked, staring into her sad, frightened eyes.

She looked at him and seemed to gain strength from him. She took a deep shuttering breath and nodded. “I believe you, Will. What do you want me to do?” she said, stiffening her spine and wiping the tears off her face.

Will pulled the vial containing his remaining scent blocker out of his pocket. He applied some to his wrists and the back of his neck, then told Abigail to do the same.

“Why are we doing this?” she asked, confused.

These wendigoes seem to be as much animal as human, so they probably have keener senses than humans. I grew up near the Louisiana bayou, Abigail, and my dad was a hunter as well as a fisherman. He used to take me hunting with him a lot before I presented as an omega. Even after I presented he took me with him occasionally to keep up appearances. After all, it would look strange if a beta father suddenly stopped taking his beta son out with him. Anyway, dad always said that a lot of hunters failed because most animals can smell you coming a mile away. He used to rub something similar to this,” he said holding up the now empty vial, “on himself before going hunting. He’s the one who helped me formulate this to neutralize my scent, and if wendigoes hunt by smell, this will help hide our scents.”

Abigail nodded. “That’s a good idea. What else did your dad teach you?” she asked, looking hopeful now, and Will nodded his approval.

“I know how to fashion a couple of simple booby traps. We’ve got two hours to put some distance
between us and him, and along the way I’ll look for good areas to set traps. Fortunately they let me keep my pocketknife,” he said, pulling it out and feeling the edge of the blade, glad that he had kept it sharp. His dad had given this to him on his 11th birthday and it was one of his prize possessions. It may just help save their lives now.

“It’s awfully small,” she said doubtfully.

“So are you,” he teased, “but I wouldn’t underestimate you. Come on,” he said, tugging her hand to get her moving again.

Will scanned the jungle as they moved, looking for the supplies he needed. Every now and then he would stop and examine a vine or look at the branches of young trees. He handed the vines he collected to Abigail to carry while he started sharpening the ends of smaller sticks he picked up, each being about a foot-and-a-half long. The thinner sticks he sharpened on both ends, the thicker ones on one end. When he had a stick sharpened to his satisfaction, he handed it off to Abigail and started on the next one, all the while moving through the jungle and keeping an eye out for the other things he needed.

When they stepped over a fallen tree trunk in a narrowed part of the trail they had been following, Will stopped, nodding his head. “This is where we set our first trap,” he said to Abigail.

“What do you mean?” she asked, trying to see what he was seeing.

These creatures, these wendigos are no doubt natural trackers so we’ll have to assume Randall will be able to follow our trail no matter how careful we are. He will probably just expect us to be running frightened through the jungle trying to stay ahead of him. He won’t suspect that we might be laying traps. You see this tree trunk blocking the trail here? Randall will have to step over it just as we did to continue on his way … but we’re going to have a little surprise for him.”

Will took one of the heavier sticks with the single pointed end from Abigail and knelt down in front of the log and used it to start digging a hole. “I’m going to need your help on this Abigail,” he said. “Two hours sounds like a long time, but it’s really not. Take one of the heavier pointed sticks and help me dig a hole. It needs to be about a foot in diameter and a foot deep. When Randall steps over the log he’ll be expecting his foot to come down on solid ground. But we’ll have our little man trap covered with twigs and leaves and his foot will go straight through into the hole, and with any luck he’ll fall and break his ankle … or at least sprain it so that he won’t be able to move as fast.

Abigail knelt beside him, looking impressed, and started chopping at the soil with her stick. Will stood every now and then and tossed the dirt from the hole into the jungle. Finally, when the hole was wide enough and deep enough, they covered it with thin twigs and leaves.

“See there,” Will said, “you can’t even tell it’s there. Randall is in for quite a surprise.”

Abigail smiled now. “What other kinds of traps can we make?” she asked.

That’s my girl. “I need a couple of long sticks to make us spears so that if he comes near us we can hold him off or stab him. I’m also going to try to string a couple of those vines across the path between two trees close to the ground in shadowed areas hoping he won’t see them and trip over them.

“Another trap I have in mind is a rock swing with spikes. I take some of these thinner sticks sharpened on both ends and I strap them around a good sized rock with vines so that the spikes stick out in all different directions. We place the rock up high in the fork of a narrow tree branch
hanging over the path with a tripwire trigger. Something thin like fishing line is best, but we’ll make due with a vine. When the vine is stepped on or jostled, the spiked rock comes loose and swings down, gaining speed along the way, and will skewer anything in its path.”

“Wow!” Abigail said, impressed. “How do you know all this?”

“Setting animal traps was pretty common where I grew up,” Will said, shrugging. “I watched my dad and his friends make them all the time. I never thought I’d ever be using them myself though,” he said grimly, “but I’m glad now that I paid attention.”

They continued on, walking swiftly. Abigail helped with the search for the right materials. Soon they had a spear each with a sharpened point, some nice long pieces of vine, and a dozen thinner sticks pointed at both ends. They located a good sized rock about the size of a football and Will quickly wrapped vine around and around the rock to secure all the spikes. They found a tree branch that hung right over the path but high enough that Randall wouldn’t see it and Will climbed the tree and set the rock gently in the fork of two thin branches, then gently trailed the vine across the path. All Randall had to do was step on the vine it or kick it and it would hopefully come free from its perch and swing down on him.

Will then found a couple of good places that were in shadow due to thick tree canopies blocking out the sun, and he strung vine tautly between two trees about five inches off the ground. He ripped off long pieces of Abigail’s dress at the hem and tied them around trees located slightly behind the trip vine and at eye level.

“What are those for?” Abigail asked.

“Watch,” Will said. The next breeze that blew by made the material flutter. “See there. If he’s moving fast and he sees the material fluttering, it will draw his eye and he will make a beeline for it and hopefully not see the vine and trip over it.”

“Very clever,” Abigail said, smiling.

Will had done everything he could think of, and by his estimation their two hours was up.

* * * * *

After staying in his room brooding for two hours, Randall went back down to the basement and found his uncle waiting for him. He removed his shirt but he wouldn’t change until he was sure he was out of sight of the house. He didn’t want to risk Miss du Maurier catching sight of him out the window and going into hysterics, especially since it appeared she was to become his aunt tonight. In truth, he wasn’t particularly fond of the omega and wasn’t looking forward to her becoming part of the family. It just seemed like nothing was going right.

“Remember,” Hannibal said to him, “no matter what happens, you must be strong. They’ll both probably cry and beg for their lives; they may prostrate themselves before you and plead for mercy. Abigail will most likely whine and bare her neck in supplication hoping you’ll spare her. But when that happens, just remember how she pretended to like you during the day, but then at night she crawled into his bed, and the two of them were probably laughing at you behind your back. You can’t let sentimentality affect you.”

Randall nodded, but he wasn’t happy. He just kept thinking about how happy he had been since Abigail had arrived. His days had been so lonely before her arrival, the monotony only broken by the occasional shipwreck. He had been so sure that Abigail was the one for him and that he would be claiming her as his mate. Truth be told, as hurt as he had been when his uncle told him what he
discovered, he would have still been willing to claim Abigail as his mate and just kill Mr. Graham, but his uncle said she was unworthy of him and that there was a slight possibility that she might even be carrying Mr. Graham’s child.

He walked out the door with the sound of the Captain calling after him, begging him not to hurt them, and entered the jungle with a heavy heart. This was the first hunt he hadn’t been excited about. When he was sure he was out of sight of the house he changed into his wendigo form and followed their trail through the jungle.

A little over two hours later he had finally tracked them to a small clearing. It had been his hope that he would find them quickly and finish this so he could just put it behind him, but it had taken him longer than anticipated just to track them down. Usually he just ran swiftly through the jungle following his prey’s scent, but Mr. Graham and Abigail’s scents had been strangely absent, so he’d had to forego his sense of smell and hunt them visually by following their trail, which was slower. He was also slowed down by the fact that he had stepped into a hole and twisted his ankle slightly. He had been surprised and annoyed when he realized the hole had been dug on purpose as a trap. To make matters worse, he had then tripped over a vine stretched between two trees while being distracted by a fluttering piece of Abigail’s dress and had cracked his chin pretty good on the ground. It was all right though, because now he was good and mad.

As he faced them now he was surprised to see that they had managed to make two decent spears that were currently pointed his way. Abigail was standing slightly behind and to the side of Mr. Graham and she looked frightened and was whimpering softly, but she also looked determined. Mr. Graham looked pale, but he had his feet spread apart and braced, one slightly behind the other, and he was holding his spear tightly, watching his every move. Randall nodded in approval. If Mr. Graham fought him it would make killing him easier. Looking between them, his best course of action would be to kill Mr. Graham first; then when he was dead Abigail would probably fall weeping upon the body of her dead lover and he would just snap her neck and give her a quick death. He swallowed down his bitter disappointment at what could have been and slowly approached Mr. Graham.

“Randall, if you want to kill me, fine. Just don’t kill Abigail,” Will begged.

“Will, no!” Abigail cried.

“You’re a man now, Randall,” Will said. “Stand up to your uncle and tell him that you like her and don’t want to kill her. I know you like her, Randall, I can tell. And she likes you too. Please spare her life and I’ll drop my spear right now and you can do with me what you will.”

Randall was just about to ask why if Abigail liked him she had gone to his bed, but Abigail panicked, fearing Will’s words, and ran at Randall with her spear yelling "Noooo!"

Randall dodged left and backhanded Abigail easily, sending her sprawling on the ground. Will attacked then, and Randall managed to grab Will’s spear just three inches from his chest. He held on while Mr. Graham pushed, trying to get the sharpened point to penetrate flesh, but Randall twisted his body sideways and let the spear go harmlessly past his body. Will stumbled forward off balance, and Randall managed to pull the spear out of his hands and toss it away.

Will backpedaled quickly, barely missing the claws that swiped the air toward his throat, and only the fact that he quickly bent backwards saved his throat from being slashed. Even still, it was such a close call that Will touched his throat expecting to see blood as he backed away.
Without his spear Will was defenseless and Randall immediately lowered his antlers and charged. Will didn’t have time to turn and run; all he could do was grab onto the antlers and try and keep them from piercing his body. He managed to grab hold of the antlers, which weren’t as big as his uncles, and used all his strength to keep them from reaching his body, but as Randall pushed his advantage, Will was sliding backward and his feet slipped out from under him. He landed on his back, still managing to keep his hold on the antlers, but Randall was standing above him now pressing down hard and Will could feel the antlers inching closer and closer to his belly.

However, a pissed off Abigail had recovered from being backhanded and suddenly jumped on Randall’s back and started beating on him with her fists. Unfortunately, when she jumped on him, the added weight landing on his back helped his antlers pierce the soft flesh on Will’s left side just below the rib cage. Gasping through the pain, Will brought his right foot up and kicked Randall in the stomach, sending him stumbling backward while still dealing with the wildcat clinging to his back.

Will got up, pressing his hand over the puncture wounds while looking for his spear. He saw Randall manage to toss Abigail off his back and knew Randall would charge him again if he didn’t do something fast. Not spotting his spear he did the only thing he could think to do; he ran up to Randall while Randall was distracted watching Abigail tumble to the ground, balled up his fist, and when Randall looked at him he socked him in the face as hard as he could. Randall stumbled backward and fell, looking stunned, but he was still conscious. Will held his fist to his chest in pain. He had never hit anyone before in his life and hadn’t realized how much it would hurt. He spotted Abigail’s spear then and picked it up and grabbed her hand, and they took off running.

Randall stood up, slightly unsteady, and rubbed his jaw. He was furious now and he was going to kill Mr. Graham by ripping him limb from limb. He started to head out after them, but then the wind shifted and he froze. His nostrils flared as he scented the air, confused. He smelled blood, but he also smelled the scent of an omega, and it wasn’t Abigail’s scent. Abigail’s scent was like a mixture of cherries and vanilla, but this scent was more complex. He turned in a circle looking around as if expecting to see an omega hiding in the trees nearby, but he was alone. He walked around trying to pinpoint the exact location of the scent, and it led him back to where he had managed to spear Mr. Graham with his antlers. He knelt down and touched the blood on the ground with his fingertips and put it to his nose. It smelled like an omega’s blood … but that wasn’t possible. He touched one fingertip to the tip of his tongue and tasted the blood. An omega’s blood has a sweet, enticing taste to an alpha, and this did. Standing up and frowning, he looked over to where Abigail and Mr. Graham had disappeared into the jungle. Now that he thought about it, he realized that he had never caught Mr. Graham’s scent the whole time he was here, which was strange. He hadn’t really thought anything about it because he had just assumed the man was a beta. But why did Mr. Graham’s blood smell omegan? Feeling his anger being replaced by total confusion and not knowing what to do, he found a leaf and scraped some of the blood onto it and headed home. He needed to talk to his uncle and figure out just what the hell was going on.

Chapter End Notes

In the next chapter … well, I think you’ve probably already figured out what’s next:
HANNIBAL FINALLY FINDS OUT!! :D
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the incredible response on that last chapter. It was unbelievably awesome!

And now for the moment many of you have been waiting for: Hannibal finally finds out!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Randall changed back to human form in the jungle before stepping out into the open, and then entered the house through the basement door. He put his discarded shirt back on, ignoring the Captain’s angry demands to know what happened. His sole preoccupation right now was to find his uncle and figure out the mystery of Mr. Graham’s blood.

He went upstairs and found his uncle unsurprisingly in the kitchen, sleeves rolled up, apron on, focused on slicing vegetables all perfectly uniform and even. Randall knew the kitchen was his uncle’s sanctuary, a place he ultimately ended up when something was on his mind. Cooking was how he coped with things, his source of therapy in a way, and Randall could tell his uncle wasn’t thrilled about the idea of making Miss du Maurier his mate, that it was only his desire to reestablish the Lector bloodline with offspring that was prompting this mating.

His uncle looked up at him and smiled. “That didn’t take long. How did it go?”

“They’re not dead. Something happened.”

“Oh?” Hannibal said, putting the knife down and wiping his hands on his apron, giving his nephew his full attention. “What happened?” he asked, looking less than pleased.

As Randall moved toward him Hannibal said, “And why are you limping? And how did you get that bruise on your jaw?” he asked, examining the younger man’s face.

“It turns out that Mr. Graham knows a thing or two about setting traps. He dug a hole on the other side of a log I had to step over, and when I stepped over the log I stepped into the hole and twisted my ankle a bit when I nearly fell. Could have broken it if I hadn’t caught myself. And, uh, as for the bruise” he said, rubbing his jaw, “he also kind of slugged me,” he finished, muttering that last part.

“Mr. Graham slugged you?” Hannibal said, looking down and shaking his head while trying not to smile. One thing he would say about Mr. Graham, the man was never predictable. “Well, I was hoping it wouldn’t be too easy for you, but why are they not dead? Don’t tell me you came home simply because of a slightly sprained ankle and a bruised jaw,” he said scoldingly.

“No, that’s not it. Smell this,” Randall said, handing his uncle the leaf with the blood smeared on it.

Hannibal took the leaf and sniffed it delicately; then his eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Are you
telling me that another omega survived and made it to shore?” he asked excitedly, the complex scent of this omega making his blood quicken and his body tingle. “Is she here?” he asked eagerly, looking over Randall’s shoulder.

“No … no, that’s not what I’m saying,” Randall said.

Hannibal frowned and sniffed the blood again. “This isn’t Abigail’s scent.”

“No, it’s not. But you would agree that this is an omega’s scent?” Randall said, pointing at the leaf.

“Of course it is,” Hannibal huffed in exasperation. “Now whose blood is it?”

“It’s his blood.”

Hannibal stiffened. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, this is Mr. Graham’s blood.”

Hannibal put the leaf down and picked up the knife again and continued with his slicing. “That’s simply not possible. You must be mistaken.”

“There is no mistake. I had him pinned down and pierced him with my antlers! He managed to kick me off of him and run off, and when the wind shifted I smelled his blood. I wasn’t sure what to do after that, so I came home to talk to you.”

“Cordell,” Hannibal said, ceasing his slicing and looking at the big man standing quietly in the corner, “when you assisted Mr. Graham with his bath that first day, were you able to make the determination that he is indeed a man?”

“Yes, sir. He has nothing to brag about, if you catch my meaning, sir, but he’s a man all right.”

“See?” Hannibal said, shrugging, “he’s a man. It’s simply not possible.” But Randall noticed that his uncle’s eyes kept darting back to the leaf with an unsettled expression, and his vegetable slicing had suddenly turned sloppy and uneven.

“I know he’s a man,” Randall continued, “but I’m telling you, this is his blood and somehow it’s an omega’s blood. If it’s not his blood, then whose blood do you suppose it is?” he asked in exasperation.

With an overly dramatic sigh, Hannibal put the knife down again, took off his apron and said, “I’m sure there’s a logical explanation for this. Let’s go have a chat with Dr. Chilton and settle this nonsense once and for all.”

They found Dr. Chilton in his usual spot in the drawing room sitting on the couch near the fireplace. He appeared to have made himself a martini. Hannibal wondered if they would run out of spirits before he made his next run to the mainland for supplies. He may have to lock up his liquor cabinet. Miss du Maurier was nowhere in sight, which was good as this topic was not suitable for her delicate ears. Despite his best efforts to charm the omega, she continued to be suspicious and fearful of him, but she would have all of her answers satisfied tonight. It was unrealistic of him to continue to hope that someone better would come along, and the sooner he claimed her and turned her wendigo, the sooner he could start producing Lecter heirs. And yet… something about Randall’s claim was inexplicably causing a trickle of anticipation to course through his body, and Hannibal frowned as he realized that his breathing was elevated. This was ridiculous; why was he reacting like this?
“Dr. Chilton, I need to ask you something … as a physician,” he said, sitting down across from the
doctor while Randall stood next to his chair.

“Oh? Something ailing you, Count? Glad to help,” he said slurring his words slightly, well into
his cups already.

Hannibal paused a second while trying to figure out how to phrase this without sounding like a
doom, but since the good doctor was already slightly tipsy there was a good chance he wouldn’t
even remember this conversation, so he decided to just dive right in. “Doctor, is there any reason
that you know of that a man might smell like an omega?”

“Well, if a man were intimate with an omega he might pick up her scent …”

“Let me rephrase my question,” Hannibal said, slightly impatient. “Is there any reason for a man’s
blood to smell like an omega’s blood?”

“There’s one reason I can think of,” the doctor said, taking another drink.

Hannibal looked up at Randall with a smug “see” expression. He knew there had to be a logical
explanation for this. Mr. Graham probably had diabetes or another illness that was making his
blood smell sweet and enticing like that. “And what might that reason be, Doctor?”

“Eh?” Dr. Chilton said, looking like he had lost his train of thought.

Hannibal took a deep breath and controlled his temper. The only reason the good doctor wasn’t
currently gracing his table is because you never knew when you might need the services of a
doctor, especially when the time for child birthing came.

“What reason is there for a man’s blood to smell omegan?” Hannibal repeated.

“Oh, that’s simple. Because he is one.”

At Hannibal’s stunned look, it was Randall’s turn now to give Hannibal a gleeful “see” look.

“Are you telling me that there is such a thing as a male omega, Dr. Chilton? Surely you jest,”
Hannibal said incredulously.

“No, I’m telling you the truth. You probably haven’t heard of them before because they are
exceedingly rare. Only one in approximately every fifty thousand omegas born is a male, and then
once they present as such the parents go to great lengths to keep it a secret.”

“Why would the parents try to hide an omega’s status?” Hannibal asked.

“Are you joking?” Dr. Chilton said tipsily. “Because omegas are supposed to be female. Male
omegas are unnatural. Even the church has condemned them as unnatural creatures and refuses to
condone the marriage of a male omega to any alpha … or even a beta. From what I’ve heard, most
male omegas whose status is discovered either end up committing suicide or working in a brothel
catering to the needs of alphas with unnatural desires. The thought of two men together in an
intimate way like that …” Dr. Chilton shuddered in disgust … “it’s just horrific. Although I have
heard tell that France is becoming more tolerant of these…freaks. Good lord, what’s the world
coming to! There are female alphas as well, also rare and also considered unnatural,” Dr. Chilton
said, shuddering again at the thought.

Hannibal frowned as he mulled this over for a minute. “So, since these male omegas are
considered unnatural, I take it they’re not true omegas. They wouldn’t be able to bear children …”
“Not true,” Dr. Chilton said, raising his glass, sloshing liquid onto his hand. Physically they look like a man on the outside, although a bit softer looking, less body hair, etc. However, internally their anatomy is slightly rearranged and they are every bit as able to bear a child as a female omega. Can you imagine a man bearing a child? It’s just preposterous. When God created Adam as an alpha and Eve as an omega …”

“Yes, yes,” the Count said, cutting him off impatiently before a lengthy biblical lecture started. “Well thank you, Dr. Chilton. This has been most helpful,” he said, rising from the chair.

“Oh,” Dr. Chilton said, looking as if he’d lost his train of thought again. “Always glad to be of help, Count,” he said, raising his glass again.

Hannibal and Randall left the drawing room, closing the double doors behind them.

“Will is a male omega,” the Count said, still looking stunned. “He’s a male omega and he’s been hiding what he is because fools like Dr. Chilton consider him a freak.”

Hannibal closed his eyes then and reviewed the events of last night with this new information. When he opened them, he looked abashed. “My god, Randall, I had it all wrong. When Miss Hobbs went to Mr. Graham’s room last night, it wasn’t because she was seeking out her lover; she was probably just seeking the comfort of another omega. All of Bedelia’s suspicious prattle probably upset her. She must know that he’s an omega. I sent you out to kill two innocent omegas,” he said guiltily, remembering all the cruel words he had said to the two of them and the confused, frightened looks on their faces. And even when he was insulting them and terrorizing them, Mr. Graham had never once let his beta persona crack, not one bit. And his scent! How in the world had he hidden that enticing scent so thoroughly? If Mr. Graham had only given some indication that he was an omega, this whole unfortunate situation might have been avoided. The Count then felt panicked as he remembered the blood. “Randall, how badly is Mr. Graham hurt?” he asked.

“Well, he was able to kick me off him and slug me afterwards, so I couldn’t have hurt him too badly,” Randall replied.

Hannibal sighed with relief. And why was it he had just felt an unexpected swell of pride that this particular omega had been able to fend off an alpha trying to kill him? But now that he knew Mr. Graham was an omega, it explained so much. There was always something about Mr. Graham that had bothered him on a deep, elusive level. There was the way his body had reacted when he saw him in the bath that first day, the draw he felt whenever he was near Mr. Graham, the dream-sharing they had experienced. The signs had been there, but he had been too blind to see what they meant because he had no idea that male omegas existed. It also opened up a whole new possibility. If Mr. Graham was indeed capable of bearing children … The only question now was did he want him as his mate and would he have a problem being intimate with a man? Removing the fact that he’s a man from the equation, it was an easy choice. Mr. Graham was smart and kind and brave; and as protective as he was with Abigail, Hannibal knew he would be equally protective of any children they might have. If he were being truthful, he suspected that Miss du Maurier had the maternal instincts of a coconut tree. Remembering the dream they had shared and his frustration when it had ended suddenly, he didn’t think that intimacy would be a problem. Mr. Graham was baffling and aggravating and frustrating and confusing … and he wanted him, he suddenly realized. Now that he knew he was an omega, he wanted him more than anything he had ever wanted in his life. The smell of his blood had made every cell in his body come alive and tingle. He wanted him so badly that if he were denied him, he didn’t know what he would do. The realization shook him to his core, but it also told him what he needed to do.
“What do you think of Mr. Graham, Randall?” Hannibal asked, making sure to keep his face neutral and his thoughts hidden.

Randall thought about it. He had liked the quiet man up until the point he thought he was Abigail’s lover. Now that he knew the man was an omega he was back to liking him. He was even grateful that Mr. Graham had fought so hard to protect them both or things could have ended tragically out there. “Well, to be truthful, if you’re considering him as your mate, I’d prefer him over Miss du Maurier. All she does is wring her hands and act nervous and hide in her room. Plus, Abigail likes him, so if he were to become part of the family, it would make it a lot easier for her to adapt.

Hannibal smiled and nodded at Randall, feeling his mood lighten considerably. He had made his decision.

Randall smiled back, seeing the change in his uncle’s demeanor. “So, is it safe to assume that I can now claim Abigail as my mate?” Randall asked, looking hopeful.

“Yes. I made a terrible mistake and misjudged them both, and I’m going to do everything in my power to make it up to them. But first we have to catch them so I can try and explain to them what happened and beg their forgiveness. Mind you, they’re going to take some convincing that we’re not coming after them to kill them after the things I said to them, but I’m sure once we catch them we can convince them to see reason. It shouldn’t be too hard for the two of us to catch and subdue two omegas until we can get them to see reason. Now, why don’t you go have Dr. Chilton wrap that ankle up to immobilize it while I put the vegetables away, and then we’ll head out and bring our mates home,” the Count said, heading back to the kitchen with a spry step and looking happier than Randall had seen him look in a very long time.

As Randall watched his uncle walk away, he smiled knowingly. His uncle had only seen Mr. Graham and Abigail cowering in the basement; he hadn’t seen them in action protecting each other and fighting for their lives. His uncle seemed to think this was going to be an easy task; Randall thought he was in for a big surprise. Randall decided he would just hang back and let his uncle take the lead here … and then enjoy watching the fireworks. His intended was not your typical omega and he was certainly going to be a handful, but at least his uncle would never get bored as he was sure to have become with Miss du Maurier.

Randall’s heart felt much lighter now, as if the world had suddenly righted itself. He would be able to claim his beautiful, wonderful, spirited Abigail as his mate after all, and Miss du Maurier was no longer destined to become his aunt. He felt giddy with happiness and anticipation and couldn’t wait to head out with his uncle to hunt down their soon-to-be mates.

As Randall headed back to the drawing room to ask Dr. Chilton to wrap his ankle, he rubbed his sore jaw and smiled in anticipation wondering what happens when two indomitable forces collide. He suspected he was about to find out.

Chapter End Notes

Are you ready for yet another hunt, one with a different end game? If so, I hope you join me for the next chapter, which is currently over 6,000 words!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Sorry, another super long chapter, but this is the big hunt and I didn’t want to split it up. I hope you all enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hannibal moved through the jungle with purpose, the thought of hunting down and claiming his mate making a primitive part of his brain roar in approval and his blood quicken with anticipation. Glancing over at his nephew, he smiled. It seemed like only yesterday that Randall had been a child, climbing on his lap and snuggling against him with a thumb in his mouth while his mother looked fondly between the two of them, and now look at him. He could see that Randall was just as excited as he was about hunting down his soon-to-be mate and starting a family of his own. If all went well, Hannibal would soon become both a father and a great-uncle. He wished Mischa were here to see the fine man her son had grown up to be.

Hannibal let Randall take the lead so he could take them swiftly to where he had last seen the pair. They would stay in their human forms to appear less threatening to the two omegas, and with any luck they would track them down quickly and clear up this whole mess.

As they carefully stepped over the log, Randall showed his uncle the simple hole they had dug as a trap, and Hannibal nodded at how cleverly it had been placed. Hannibal also looked with interest at the vines strung across the path in shaded areas with the fluttering pieces of Abigail’s dress as a distraction. However, they were both surprised when the rock swing came hurtling toward them. Apparently Randall had missed triggering it passing this way before, but the two of them stepping on the vine together set it in motion, and they both went diving in different directions to avoid being skewered.

“I told you,” Randall said smiling as his uncle picked himself off the ground and examined the lacerations on his upper arm that were made as the rock swing grazed him swinging past.

Hannibal looked at the rock as it continued swinging back and forth like a pendulum, and he had to admit he was highly impressed, especially now knowing that it was made by an omega.

They reached the clearing where Randall had drawn blood and Hannibal bent down and touched his fingers to the spots of blood on the soil and held it to his nose, feeling almost intoxicated by the scent, but also feeling angry at himself. He was responsible for his omega being injured. Randall had assured him that his antlers hadn’t pierced Mr. Graham’s flesh deeply, and the small amount of blood on the ground would seem to bear that out, but he felt guilt and concern nonetheless as his protective instincts were already starting to surface toward the omega he already considered his.

Hannibal stood up and found the path they took, the trampled foliage and broken leaves clearly marking the way. He breathed in deeply and caught their scent, but it was faint, muted. “They must be moving fast,” he said to his nephew. “This way,” he said eagerly, taking the lead now.

“What’s your plan when we find them?” Randall asked, running behind his uncle, his ankle throbbing slightly. “They’re not going to trust us now.”
“I know. But we’re alphas. We’ll gently subdue them and convince them that we’re not here to harm them; then I’ll apologize and beg their forgiveness.”

Randall rolled his eyes behind his uncle’s back. His uncle hadn’t seen the two of them in action. He didn’t think there would be any ‘gently subduing’ these two.

“It looks like they’re heading for higher ground,” Hannibal said. “If they reach the top of the cliff in the center of the island, they’ll see us coming.”

And he was right.

The cliff was a rocky crag jutting out from the center of the island and only about as tall as a four-story building, but as soon as they reached the base of the cliff and started climbing, they were suddenly pelted with good-sized stones.

“OUCH!” Randal said, rubbing his arm and ducking another missile that barely missed his head.

“Any more bright ideas, uncle?”

“Now we talk to them,” Hannibal said. “I’m sure they’ll be reasonable. Mr. Graham! Miss Hobbs!” he called out. “We just want to talk!”

“Oh, I think we’ve heard enough of your talking to last us a lifetime, Count,” Will shouted down.

“Yeah, more than enough,” Abigail chimed in, a stone the size of an egg following her words and making contact with Hannibal’s thigh.

“Confound it!” he said, rubbing his thigh. “Will, Abigail,” he said, changing his tact and using their first names to make it more personable, “we’re not here to harm you. There’s been a terrible mistake and I would like to explain. Now, can we please call a ceasefire so I may state my case?”

“Sure, go right ahead,” Will shouted down.

“Thank you,” Hannibal said, stepping back from the cliff out in the open and holding his hands out in a placating manner, hoping they could see him. He then started explaining what happened and how he came to all the wrong conclusions. He apologized for what he had put them through, reiterated they meant them no harm, and asked if they would please come down now. He waited in the ringing silence that followed. “Will?”

No answer.

“Maybe they’re thinking it over,” Randall offered.

Hannibal waited a few more seconds before calling out again. “Will, Abigail, did you hear me?”

Still no answer.

Hannibal started climbing the cliff cautiously while looking out for airborne missiles, but when he reached the top, Abigail and Will were nowhere to be found. They had gone down the other side while he had been talking.

Hannibal growled in frustration and rubbed his face. Randall, who had climbed up right behind him, was biting his lower lip to keep from laughing.

They climbed down the other side of the cliff and set out after them, still being cautious of any traps.
In the meantime, Will and Abigail were moving swiftly through the jungle.

“Will, what are we going to do? They’re both after us now!” Abigail cried in dismay as they ran through the jungle. Will felt a touch of panic himself. He thought Randall was to hunt them alone, but now they had both predators after them. He stopped suddenly when they reached the edge of a large swampy bog. They could certainly go around the bog, but as Will looked across it he felt a smile tugging at his lips. His childhood house had sat right on the edge of the bayou so he had learned early on how to make his way through swampland. Let’s see them follow us through here, Will thought, and he realized with surprise that there was a tiny part of him (the part not currently terrified) that was enjoying thwarting the two alphas. And now that he thought about it, having both alphas after them might actually work to their advantage as it had just given him an idea. If they could navigate the swamp quickly, they might survive this yet.

“Grab my waistband, Abigail, and stay right behind me. I’ve got an idea,” he said, leading her into the swamp.

Hannibal and Randall arrived at the edge of the swamp shortly thereafter, having quickly followed their scent.

“Surely they wouldn’t go in there!” Randall said, sounding alarmed now. “They’ll end up getting sucked down into one of the bogs!”

Hannibal studied the footprints and sighed, shaking his head. “That’s exactly where they’ve gone. Look, the footprints are in single file, so Will must be leading with Abigail walking directly behind him.” Hannibal pointed at holes in the ground and said, “Will must be using a stick to poke the ground in front of him to check how solid the ground is before walking on it, which is clever, but it’s still extremely dangerous,” he said worriedly. “We’d better hurry as they’ll most likely need rescuing.”

Hannibal carefully followed the tracks and told Randall to mimic his every step. Even then, it was Hannibal who almost ended up needing rescuing as he came close to falling into a bog after following a phony trail made with the stick holes that led him right to a bog covered with grass and leaves so that it looked like solid ground. Only Randall quickly grabbing his arm and pulling him back saved him from falling in and possibly being sucked under if it were one of the deeper bogs. After that the Count was more careful, but it meant going slower.

When they came out the other side of the bog Hannibal was sweating, disheveled, and the salt from his sweat was making the lacerations on his arm sting. Not only that, the mosquitoes who lived in the swamp had seemed to single him out with a kind of rabid glee, no doubt lured by the smell of blood on his arm, and had attacked him like a swarm of flying leeches. He now sported a dozen good-sized itchy welts. And he was getting angry. Who knew two omegas would be so blasted hard to catch? He studied their trail now and frowned. “It looks like they’ve turned east.”

“Are you sure? East would take them back home,” Randall said, wiping the sweat off his forehead with his sleeve and scratching a welt on his own neck.

“Hannibal thought about it; then looked suddenly panicked.

“What’s wrong!”

“They are heading back home.”

“Why would they do that?”
“So they can try and free the only other alpha on the island.”

Randall’s eyes widened in alarm. “Oh, no! If they succeed in freeing the captain …”

“Then things are going to get decidedly more complicated,” Hannibal said. “The captain heard everything I said to them and thinks we want them dead. If they manage to find the key and free him, he will be a formidable force and will try to kill us both, and our two feisty omegas will try and help him do it. We cannot let it get that far! We have to catch them before they reach the house! Come on!” Hannibal said, taking off running.

Hannibal ran outright through the jungle and Randall tried to keep up the best he could with his ankle. Hannibal honed in on Will’s scent and it was stronger now, so he followed his nose quickly along the trail of broken and trampled foliage, and there was no doubt in his mind now that they were heading back home. Will appeared to have a keen sense of direction. When he was within 50 feet of the house the Count heard them up ahead and increased his speed. He couldn’t let them reach the house. If they got through the front door they would lock the heavy door behind them. Then one of them would probably stand guard in front of the door with some sort of weapon to keep Cordell and Abel from unlocking it while the other went in the basement and secured that door while searching for the key to release the captain.

He had them in visual now. Abigail was running slightly behind Will and he saw her glance back as if she sensed them, and there was terror on her face when she spotted him.

Slowly closing the gap he caught up to her and grabbed her around the waist, pulling her to a stop. Abigail screamed in terror, thrashing in his arms, and Will stopped immediately, as Hannibal knew he would, and turned to face him. Will still had Abigail’s spear and was holding it threatenly now, although he looked frightened as his eyes kept flicking worriedly between Abigail and him.

“Let her go!” he shouted angrily.

“Will, we’re not here to harm you,” he said, keeping Abigail in front of him to prevent Will from attacking him. He smelled Will’s blood and saw the red stain on the front of his shirt and felt guilt wash over him again.

“Funny, that’s the exact opposite of what you said in your trophy room just a few short hours ago. In fact, you were exceedingly clear about what you thought of the two of us and what you intended. As I recall, you said we are unexceptional, unworthy, and our only benefit is to be served up as an entrée for more deserving individuals such as yourselves,” he shouted, beautifully flushed with righteous anger.

Hannibal had the decency to look embarrassed by the harsh reminder. “But things are different now,” he said gently. “I didn’t have all the facts.”

“Oh, you didn’t have all the facts,” Will threw back at him. “Well, what other facts could there be that would prevent you from killing and eating us? The fact that you ran out of seasonings to cook us with?” he asked mockingly, still holding the spear aggressively, looking for an opening.

“Like knowing now that you’re an omega,” Hannibal said, flicking his eyes down to the blood on Will’s shirt and back, watching as Will almost dropped the spear, his eyes widening and his cheeks flushing even redder.

Abigail went still in the Hannibal’s arms. After a few seconds pause where Will was having trouble meeting the Hannibal’s eyes he said, “Even if that were true, how would it change anything?”
“It changes everything, Will. First off, it changes an unfortunate perception I had when I witnessed something. Let me ask you a question. If you were to see an omega going into the bedchambers of a male beta in the middle of the night and not coming back out, what conclusion would you arrive at?”

“I would probably think …” but then he cut off and his eyes got big. “You saw Abigail go into my room last night.”

“I did. And I assumed that what I was seeing was an omega, who had been showing an interest in my nephew, going to the bed of her beta lover.”

Abigail gasped in his arms and looked over accusingly at Randall, who was now standing next to his uncle, looking sheepish. “You actually thought of me as some sort of floozy who was carrying on an affair under your roof!” Abigail shouted at Randall, blushing bright red from embarrassment and anger. “That’s what you think of me?!” she added, squirming to get out of Hannibal’s grip.

Hannibal released her and she went and stood next to Will, folding her arms over her chest and looking livid.

“I know now that I was mistaken,” Hannibal said, “and I apologize to you both. But how was I to know? I had no idea that male omegas even existed.”

“But if you’re not here to kill us, what do you want?” Will said, looking heartbreakingly desperate and hopeful, but still not lowering the spear.

“What I would like, Will, is for all of us to become family. Randall would like Abigail to become his mate and I would like you to become mine.”

Will’s mouth fell open, a stunned look on his face. He clearly was not expecting that. “You want me to …” Then he shook his head, hands tightening his grip on the spear. “No, no, you’re lying.

“Of all the nerve!” Abigail said, stamping her foot and glaring at Randall. “You think I would honestly become your mate after you imagined me to be a trollop and then tried to kill me? And let’s not forget the fact that you actually struck me, you brute!” she yelled, touching her cheek and glaring at him. “Hah! In your dreams, buster!”

“I’m sorry, Abigail,” Randall said lamely, clearly at a loss for words, his turn to blush with embarrassment now.

“No,” Will said fiercely, not backing down, “this is just some sort of trick in order to get us to lower our guard so you can kill us. Well it won’t work.”

As much as Hannibal admired how feisty and brave Will was, it was time to show him who the alpha was. Without warning he rushed Will, grabbed the spear when Will tried to stab him with it, and pulled it out of his hands, tossing it aside. He then grabbed Will’s arm and pulled him to him, Will’s back to his front, banding his arms around him so that he was trapped against his body. Abigail attacked Hannibal immediately, pummeling him with her fists and pulling at his arms trying to free Will, but Randall came up and grabbed her.

“Take her somewhere private and convince her of what you want,” Hannibal said. “But remember, Randall, she’s still human,” he said meaningfully, implying that Randall shouldn’t take things too far.

Randall ducked down and scooped Abigail up over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes and headed off into the jungle, the girl fighting and kicking and screaming the whole time.
“Abigail!” Will shouted, desperately struggling against Hannibal to free himself and go help his friend.

Hannibal buried his face in the man’s neck and growled and Will went stock still, but the stubborn omega refused to present his neck in submission like an omega normally would when an alpha had their teeth at their throat. He also hadn’t made a sound, but the Count could smell the sour tang of fear and feel Will’s heart hammering underneath the arm banded across his chest.

Hannibal nuzzled Will’s neck then, inhaling deeply, finally smelling his true scent fully for the first time. Whatever it was that he had been wearing to mask his scent had been mostly sweated off. He inhaled again and opened his mouth so that he could taste his scent on the back of his tongue, and closed his eyes in appreciation of Will’s complex scent. He remembered his mother once telling him that one way to identify your true mate is by scent. She told him their scent would be the best thing you ever smelled. And she was right. Will’s scent was amazing, even slightly soured by fear. The closest thing he could compare it to was Krupnikas, a traditional Lithuanian drink that combined vodka, honey, orange peel, vanilla bean, ginger, cardamom, allspice, and another 20 spices—a sweet, fragrant blend that is said to taste like heaven on fire. There was also a smokiness around the edge of Will’s scent that told Hannibal Will’s heat was mere days away, and when that happened he had no doubt that Will would smell and taste and feel like heaven on fire.

Hannibal’s body was tingling, responding quickly to Will’s scent, his primitive wendigo side roaring at him to take this omega as his mate and to consummate their union here on the jungle floor now, to sink his teeth into the gland behind Will’s neck and suck at the sweet nectar he would find there that would ensure their bond while enjoying the physical pleasures of his body. But he knew he had keep that part of him at bay and stay in control. If he were to consummate this union physically now and Will were to become pregnant before he turned wendigo, he would give birth to a nėra lyties like Cordell and Abel. He had waited too long to to find a mate to let that happen. No matter how badly he wanted to continue what their dream-sharing had started, he would have to wait five days from the point of the bonding bite for Will to become fully wendigo. Still, there were other ways to show Will the pleasures of being an omega and to make the bite less painful.

Will was still struggling against him. “Shh-shh,” Hannibal said, his mouth near Will’s ear as he rubbed his cheek along the side of Will’s face. “It will be all right, Will. Randall won’t hurt her, I promise. I was telling you the truth when I said we don’t want to hurt either of you. Randall does wants Abigail to become his mate, as I want you to become mine.”

“You’re lying. No one wants a male omega as their mate,” Will said bitterly. “You just want to eat me,” he said, but with less anger.

“Oh, I do want to devour you, Will,” Hannibal said sensuously, running his lips and the tip of his tongue up and down Will’s neck while the stubborn omega brought his shoulders up and tried to sink his neck down into them like a turtle, “just not in the way you’re imagining.” Hannibal felt angry at a society that would make any omega see themselves as something shameful and undesirable. He would have to undo all those years of negative reinforcement and convince Will that it’s all right to be who he is and to embrace the omega part of him that he had buried way down deep and all but forgotten for so many years, to show him what it feels like to be an omega again.

He ran one hand through the back of Will’s soft hair and gently gripped it so he could angle Will’s head to the side. He felt Will shiver as he continued to run his lips up and down the side of his neck, and then felt him relax a bit. An alpha’s scent often has a calming effect on an omega’s anxiety, so thinking Will was more relaxed he took a chance and loosened his hold on him … and got an elbow in his ribs for his trouble. Will broke free from him and picked up the spear and
faced him down, stealing glances in the direction Randall had taken off with Abigail, so he knew that Will was still worried about her.

“Will, I told you, Abigail will be fine,” Hannibal said, trying his best to look sincere and nonthreatening. “You both will.”

“Does turning us into cannibalistic creatures constitute as being fine?” Will asked.

“I was born a wendigo, Will. I had no more control over it than you did of being born a male omega. I would think you of all people would understand that. The big difference between you and me is that while your parents felt the need to hide what you were like it was something shameful, my parents would have killed anyone who would have dared treat me like I was some sort of freak. I was allowed to grow up embracing my nature, while you grew up being ashamed of it and hiding it behind some fake persona. From what I gather, Will, all your life you’ve had to live in constant fear that what you are would be discovered. Dr. Chilton told us how male omegas are thought of and treated in your world. Well I can promise you that that will not be the case here. Being a wendigo would put both you and Abigail at the top of the food chain. Here with us you can be free to be who you are. You won’t have to hide it or be ashamed of it. Here you can have a life of freedom, of love, friends, family, children …” He saw it then. When he had said the word ‘children’ Will’s eyes had widened slightly and there had been a slight intake of air. Hannibal had found Will’s Achilles heel. Children was something Will wanted but never thought to have and Hannibal would use that now to win him over.

“I want children, Will, and I want lots of them. I want the house to ring with the sound of children’s laughter. Our children, Abigail and Randall’s children, and eventually Jack’s children when we find him a mate. And we’ll add others. We’ll all live together as one big happy family and protect each other. I know you care about Abigail. Wouldn’t it be nice for us to all live together as a family?”

Hannibal saw Will weakening, saw the yearning there. He was making headway, so he pressed on. “Let me ask you this: If you go back to your own world, what’s waiting for you there other than a fearful, loveless existence? Omegas aren’t meant to live a solitary existence, Will. Living as you are will only crush your spirit. Stay here with me and I will love you like you deserve. Please Will, give me a chance,” he said, holding out his hand.

Will lowered the spear. The picture Hannibal was painting was something he had only ever imagined in his dreams. He couldn’t deny he had been attracted to the Count before all this had come about. Could it be that if he stayed here he could have everything he thought would forever be denied him? Could he actually have a mate, have children, maybe even have love some day if the Count was to be believed. And he would be with Abigail. He swallowed, thinking hard, and looked up at Hannibal with so much hope that it broke Hannibal’s heart. “You really don’t care that I’m a male omega?” he asked.

“I really don’t.”

“And you really want me as your mate?”

“I do. And if you drop that spear I would be more than happy to show you,” Hannibal said.

Will lowered the spear tip and walked toward Hannibal slowly, his head bowed in submission. Finally, Hannibal thought, sighing in relief … that is, until Will swung the spear and caught Hannibal behind his left knee, making the alpha’s leg collapse so that he fell sideways onto his hands and knees.
Will ran toward the path Randall had taken, but stopped suddenly and turned back to Hannibal looking angry. “The whole time I’ve been on this island I’ve seen you flirting with Miss du Maurier, and yet now I’m supposed to believe that it’s me you want as your mate?” Will said, shaking his head. “Don’t take me for a fool, Count!” he said bitterly, then turned and ran off in the direction of Randall and Abigail.

Hannibal slapped the ground, growling in frustration, but it was aimed at himself. How could he have been so stupid as to forget that Will would have seen his many useless attempts at wooing Miss du Maurier. He had been flirting with the other omega right under Will’s nose. When Will had stopped and turned back just now he had looked angry, but Hannibal had also seen hurt in those expressive eyes. He needed to make this right, but first he needed to catch him before he thwarted his nephew’s own attempts at winning Abigail over.

He charged through the jungle and his nostrils flared as he caught his prey’s scent, and he couldn’t deny that his mate’s spirited performance and the chase was arousing him greatly. He just had to make sure he remained in control.

When Will was in sight he increased his speed, but Will increased his as well, sensing the danger behind him. Hannibal growled and pushed himself harder, finally getting close enough to grab the back of Will’s shirt and push him into the nearest tree, albeit a little harder than he intended, and then sandwiched Will between the tree and his body, effectively trapping him while Will made a cry of distress, the first omegan sound the Count had heard him make. Will was struggling against him, but also trembling, no doubt expecting the worst. The Count hated frightening him like this, but clearly words were having little effect on him, so it was time to show him he desired him as his mate without using words.

Hannibal backed up a bit and grabbed Will’s shoulders and spun him around so that he was facing him and pressed his body back against the tree before he tried to flee. Will surprised him by showing his teeth and growling at him, and Hannibal found this unexpected fiery display by an omega surprisingly endearing and arousing. He brought his face closer to Will’s and Will automatically turned his face away from Hannibal, unintentionally baring his neck. Hannibal actually loved the fact that Will was nearly as tall as him so he just had to lower his face to bring it into the crook of Will’s neck. He ran his mouth up and down the side of his throat, sucking on the flesh there, which tasted a bit salty. Will made a squeak of surprise and tried to push him off, but Hannibal grabbed his wrists and pinned them behind Will’s back one-handed at the base of his spine.

He pulled back a little and looked at Will, who was looking up at him with a nervous look of suspicion, and Hannibal decided he was going to kiss that look right off his face. Running his hand up Will face and then through his curls, he gripped tight to keep Will from turning away and brought his mouth down on Will’s and kissed him thoroughly. Will’s lips, which started off stiff against his, slowly softened. When the Count pulled away this time and looked down at the man, he looked slightly stunned.

“Ohh…” was all Will said.

Hannibal smiled, realizing then that this had been Will’s first kiss and lowered his head for another. As Hannibal kissed him this time, he felt Will’s tentative, clumsy attempt to kiss him back. This time when the Count pulled away, Will’s eyes were dreamy looking and his lips were pink and swollen and slightly parted. He was still trembling a bit, but Hannibal could tell by his mellowing scent that it wasn’t purely fear now. Looking at that luscious mouth Hannibal knew it was made for kissing and he released Will’s wrists and wrapped his arms around Will and pulled him to him for another bruising kiss. Will whimpered then, and Hannibal thrilled at the sound.
Breaking the kiss, he put his forehead against Will’s and said, “I never really wanted Miss du Maurier as my mate, Will, but I was lonely and wanted to start a family and she was the only omega who, as far as I knew, had managed to make it to shore. Once I found out about you the choice was easy. I want you, Will, and only you. Even if a hundred omegas made it to shore tomorrow I would still choose you.

“But why? Why would you want someone like me?” Will asked, looking genuinely confused.

“Because, Will,” Hannibal said, slightly exasperated, “you’re smart and beautiful and kind and protective, and I can tell that you’ll be an excellent parent … everything I could possibly want in a mate,” he replied.

Hannibal felt a spike of pleasure coming from Will at his words, and as Will looked up at him, his eyes were full of a desperate kind of hope. He could tell that Will wanted to believe him.

“I never thought that anyone would ever want me,” Will said. “I was sure I was destined to die alone, an old maid living vicariously through watching the people around me, or through my dreams.”

“Like the dream you had last night?” Hannibal asked, tilting his head with a slight smile.

Will gasped and blushed. “I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he said, looking away guiltily.

“Will, I have to confess something. Certain members of the Lecter bloodline experience something called dream-sharing when they have a strong connection with someone. You and I apparently have such a connection and I was having the same dream that you were having last night … that is, until Abigail knocked on your door and broke the connection,” he said wryly.

Will blushed bright red now thinking about how intimate the dream was and how wantonly he had responded; then the pieces fell together. “When the connection broke you went to your door and saw Abigail go into my room, didn’t you?”

“I did. And I can’t tell you how frustrated I was regarding her ill timing.”

Will couldn’t help but remember that he had thought the same thing.

“We can’t recreate that dream until you are fully wendigo, but I could give you a small taste of it, if you’ll let me,” he said enticingly.

Will was biting his lip, looking nervous and uncertain, but then he glanced up at the Count shyly and gave a small nod. Hannibal lowered Will to the ground and covered him with his body, letting his warmth and scent envelop him. Will looked slightly panicked and his cheeks looked like they were on fire, but there was also an underlying eagerness there.

Hannibal resumed kissing him and nuzzling his neck while slotting their bodies together, then moved experimentally trying to cause a delicious friction between them. At Will’s sharp intake of breath, the Count realized he had forgotten Will's wound. He sat up on his knees and pushed Will’s shirt up so he could take a look and swatted Will’s hands away as he tried to stop him, blushing beet red as Hannibal examined his bare stomach, touching it lightly. Hannibal examined the punctures as three antler points had managed to pierce the flesh, but thankfully none were deep and the blood had already clotted.

“We’ll have Dr. Chilton treat these just as soon as we get you home,” Hannibal said.
“Home?”

“Yes, Will, home. My home, your home, Randall’s, Abigail’s, Jack’s … our home.”

Hannibal looked down at Will then, shiny mahogany curls with sun-kissed auburn highlights framing a pale face currently flushed a rosy pink, inset with a pair of brilliant blue-green eyes fringed with thick lashes that were looking up at him expectantly, moist lips parted and panting softly as if he couldn’t get enough oxygen in his lungs. “My god, you’re beautiful, Will,” he said, and he could swear that just for a second he saw delight in those eyes before Will lowered his gaze in shy embarrassment.

Hannibal detected that Will’s scent was changing, becoming stronger, purer, and he felt a sense of alpha pride knowing that Will was becoming aroused. An omega’s scent when aroused is designed to stimulate an alpha, make them want to mate with them, and Hannibal was not immune to this by any means. His body, already aroused by the chase, was near the point of losing control now that he was enveloped in Will’s heady scent, but he knew he had to stay in control, which is why he swallowed thickly and resisted the urge to rip Will’s clothes off, although his fingers kept flexing with the need to do just that, to see that pale flesh fully unveiled that he had only partially glimpsed that first day when Will was in the bath. He was becoming consumed with the need to touch and explore every square inch of him, and to claim him fully. He closed his eyes and swallowed again knowing this was not the end game. The end game would be in five days’ time when Will was wendigo and they could come together as equals, and what a glorious day that would be. The Count pictured Will running through the jungle in his wendigo form as he pursued him; then catching him, pushing him to the ground and mounting him … Hannibal groaned and he was panting with need now, and it wasn’t helping that Will was tilting his head back slightly and starting to squirm restlessly under him now, making soft noises.

Hannibal didn’t want to lay on top of Will again and risk opening his wounds, so he lay on his side and pulled Will’s back against his chest. He parted Will’s thighs by wedging his knee between them and pulled Will fully against him so that Will’s head was leaning back against his shoulder so that they were cheek to cheek. This was actually good because Will wouldn’t be able to see him when he changed to his wendigo form to bite him. Hannibal nuzzled Will’s neck while he brought a hand around Will’s body and just started touching him, getting him used to the feeling; running his hand up his arm, his side, across his chest, back down avoiding his injury, over his hip, then brought his hand over and cupped the front of Will’s pants as the omega cried out in surprise and arched into his hand and threw his head back and keened at the unexpected intimate contact.

Even though Hannibal knew he couldn’t consummate this union, he was in desperate need of release. He was currently so hard in his trousers that it was a painful thing. He popped the top two buttons of Will’s trousers and slipped his hand inside, between his pants and undergarment. Will made a half-hearted attempt to stop him, but as the Count slipped his hand down he could feel that his little omega was fully aroused, the front of his shorts wet. He could only image what it would feel like if he moved his hand lower to his entrance. He swallowed again, panting to stay in control. The Count could feel Will’s heart hammering, hear that his breaths were quick and shallow. Sexual excitement doesn’t just alter an omega’s scent, it alters the lines of an omega’s body, fuses it into new lines. An omega’s spine changes when they want to mate, a subtle, supple shifting at the base, a sharper curve at that hollow where back meets ass. The slant of jaw changes and muscles draw tight. He could sense these changes in Will now, which was good. This would go much smoother, the mating bite would be less painful if Will was totally lost in these feelings of sexual excitement. Wendigos usually perform the mating bite during the sexual act itself, but since Will wasn’t wendigo yet he would have to improvise.

Hannibal buried his nose under Will’s hair and found the mating gland which, having sensed
Will’s sexual excitement, had excreted a small pearl of fluid to enticingly lure the alpha in. He suckled the gland now while massaging Will’s groin, and Hannibal felt Will’s spine change even more, yet more curve, more pliancy. Will’s body was changing, making itself ready for its Master, growing softer and wetter and riper and fuller. That small taste of fluid from the gland behind his neck was like an opiate, drawing him in, addicting him, making him want more, and he was now picking up the sweet scent of slick. The Count could feel his control slipping away fast. He was trembling with need and knew he had to do this now before he lost all control completely.

Hannibal initiated the change to wendigo while moving against Will’s tight little derriere, which was pushing back against him now. As he changed he made sure to be careful of his claws as he continued to gently massage Will, bringing him closer and closer to completion. When the change was complete he started grinding his length harder against Will’s ass, the friction and Will’s increasingly excited scent bringing him closer to finding his own release. A wendigo’s scent is muskier, more primitive, more sexual than a human’s, and Will was responding with abandon, shoving his ass backwards harder against him, trying to squeeze his thighs together with Hannibal’s knee wedged between them, telegraphing his growing desperation with whining and mewling sounds.

“Count, please!” Will cried out.

“Call me Hannibal,” the Count panted in his ear, wanting to hear his name spoken in passion-laden tones.

“Hannibal,” Will said in a breathy voice that nearly drove Hannibal over the edge, “please!”

Hannibal growled and ground against him harder and faster while positioning his teeth right over the puffy area of the gland. He felt Will’s body start to tighten and knew he was close to his release, but just before he bit down he raised his head, barely in control, and said, “Tell me, Will. Tell me you want this.”

After a few seconds of silence that were the longest seconds Hannibal had ever experienced, Will seemed to come back to himself and said, “I am not going to kill anyone, and I don’t want to eat any more human meat.”

“You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to, I promise! Now, tell me you want this!” he said in near desperation.

“Yes! Yes! God, yes, Hannibal, please!” he sobbed, losing his brief moment of lucidity and making frantic little thrusting movements against Hannibal’s hand.

Hannibal bit down hard, his mouth filling with the sweet nectar that would cement the bond between them while his canines released a fluid of their own. Will cried out while bucking against his hand, looking for release. When he finally came he keened loudly and arched his back so hard that Hannibal was surprised his spine didn’t break.

Hannibal kept his teeth buried in Will while he continued rutting against him hard, the taste of Will and the smell of Will’s release helping to stimulate his own release, which sent shockwaves through his body clear to the tips of his toes.

Hannibal removed his teeth then and licked the area clean, feeling a sense of elation seeing his mark, his brand so beautifully displayed on his mate’s neck. They both lay together on the jungle floor panting and waiting for their breathing to get back to normal. After a while Will looked behind him at his wendigo mate and Hannibal kissed his cheek tenderly.
“You were telling the truth, you really do want me,” Will said in awe. “I didn’t think it was possible.”

The wendigo smiled and Will did not flinch from it. “I think a part of me wanted you from the first moment I saw you, I just didn’t know it because you were such a conundrum,” Hannibal said.

Will smiled then, relaxing against Hannibal, enjoying the feeling of actually being close to another person and not worrying about his status being discovered. It was so freeing not to have to worry about that. It also felt good to be wrapped in someone’s arms, especially when that someone smelled so incredibly good. He knew there were still things to be worked out between the two of them, but he felt more relaxed and content in that moment than he had in a very, very long time. He wouldn’t have to hide what he was any longer. He wouldn’t have to be ashamed or feel like a freak. And he would have a family of his own and get to live with Abigail, his first true friend. He sighed as he pulled Hannibal’s arms tighter around him and smiled.

* * * * *

Later that day Will rubbed the back of his neck feeling his connection with Hannibal as he walked along the beach with Abigail.

“So, how does it feel being bonded?” he asked the young girl.

“Kind of strange. Even though my parents wanted me mated, I thought I would be a bit older when it finally happened. Still, Randall says he loves me and I had nothing waiting for me back home. And I do love this island,” she said, holding out her arms and tilting her face up to the sun. “It’s so beautiful and peaceful here. Mind you, I made Randall suffer before I let him bite me after what he put us through,” she said smiling.

Will chuckled. “I’ll just bet you did. But what do you think about the whole being a cannibal thing?” Will asked worriedly.

Abigail studied his face a few seconds and said, “Since you trusted me with your biggest secret, I’m going to trust you with mine. Before oil was discovered on our property we were fairly poor. My dad got odd jobs here and there doing handyman work, like plumbing and carpentry, but nothing steady. Still, dad said we would never go hungry because he was a hunter, so there was always fresh meat for the table, and he would sell pelts and antlers for extra money for the other foodstuffs we needed.

“One day I went to this little cabin we had where he skinned and prepared his kills and found him butchering a man. I became a little hysterical, I don’t mind telling you, but he explained to me that he wasn’t always able to find game to feed us, and as long as he used every part of them it wasn’t murder. I didn’t really believe that, but I was 14 years old at the time and loved my father. After we became rich he didn’t have to hunt anymore, thank goodness. But the thing is, at one point I was a cannibal even before we even came to this island.”

Will mulled that over. They each had lived with parts of their lives they had had to hide away for fear of being discovered. “I told Hannibal that I am not going to kill anyone and that I don’t want to eat human meat, and he said he was okay with that, but I can tell that he thinks that once I’m wendigo I’ll change my mind.”

“So did you and Hannibal … you know?”

Will blushed. “No. Not all the way. He said even though we’re bonded now we can’t until the five days are up and I’m fully wendigo. Did you and Randall?”
“No. I sort of wanted to, but he said the same thing. I think it’s going to be a long five days,” she said.

“I think it’s going to feel even longer for Hannibal and Randall,” Will said meaningfully. “I think we need to see them suffer a little more after what they put us through, don’t you?”

The two omegas both broke out laughing.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I hope you all think Hannibal and Randall suffered enough! To Cyberkat93, inezblue, and Littleblacky … you three got your spike ball!! Yay! Only one chapter left to wind it all up and let you all know how things end up for our gang. I hope you all join me Saturday for the final chapter. -EA
Chapter 11

Epilogue

Six-and-a-half months later…

Will sat on the beach with his back against Hannibal’s chest feeling totally relaxed while enjoying the feel of the sand on his bare feet, the warmth of the setting sun on his face, and the soothing sound of the waves as they gently lapped against the shore. Hannibal was rubbing the swell of his stomach with soothing, lazy circles.

“He’s getting more active,” Will said conversationally.

“You seem sure it’s a boy,” Hannibal said.

“Omega’s intuition,” Will said, looking over his shoulder and smiling up at Hannibal. “Abigail thinks she’s carrying twins. She says twins run in her family. Her mother had a twin.”

“Well, if she does have twins, I’ll never hear the end of it from Randall. You know he’ll take all the credit for it.”

Will chuckled. “Alphas do seem to like to do that. If they have a girl, they’ve already decided to name her Mischa.”

“Mischa would have loved that,” Hannibal said. “And it’s comforting to know that she’ll continue to live on through her son.”

After a few seconds of companionable silence Will said, “It’s certainly nice having a bit of peace and quiet after the hectic day we’ve had. It took a while to get everyone settled, but I’m glad there was another shipwreck last night. We were down to Bedelia’s last leg, weren’t we? And Abigail’s been craving your kidney pie so bad I’ve seen her eyeing Dr. Chilton lately. Remind me again why it is that we need Dr. Chilton alive. Not that I’d particularly want to eat him. As much as he drinks his organs are probably all pickled.”

“What if you have trouble during childbirth? Or Abigail? What if I’m out hunting and come up against a particularly wily opponent who skewers me with a spiked rock? Or digs a hidden hole and I break my ankle? Or stabs me with a handmade spear? Or hits me in the head with a rock and cracks my skull?”

Will snorted and said, “Well, if you should happen to come up against such an opponent, I would advise you to stop trying to kill them and invite them to join the family. Such a person is obviously brilliant and would only improve the family’s gene pool.”

Hannibal chuckled. “How right you are, my love. How right you are,” he said, rubbing his face up and down the side of Will’s affectionately as he continued to rub his belly.

“You’re sure Dr. Chilton isn’t going to say anything to spook the sheep?” Will asked.

“The one thing I admire about Dr. Chilton is his keen survival instincts and healthy regard for his own skin. Not to mention the fact that he has a clear understanding of his precarious situation. He
knows that he’s on an island with no way off. He knows that there is no supply ship coming to take people back to the mainland. And he knows he’s currently surrounded by people who would rip him open and eat his liver in a heartbeat if he should give them a reason to. A good example of his self-preservation skill is the amazing change of heart he suddenly had regarding male omegas. Listening to him talk now, one would believe that they’re one of God’s greatest gifts. No, Dr. Chilton values his own life far too much to risk it trying to save others. Besides, Jack, Cordell and Abel are there keeping an eye out for any suspicious behavior.”

“Well, I’m just glad we’ll have some fresh meat soon. It’s just what we need,” Will said, putting his hand over Hannibal’s as Hannibal continued to rub his belly.

“We certainly have a nice selection to choose from,” Hannibal said thoughtfully. “It seems amazing that we had 20 survivors this time.”

“I don’t mean to brag,” Will said, “but I told you if you let me and Jack go out in the boat and thin out the shark population that there would be more survivors. I’m a good fisherman.”

“You are indeed, mylimasis,” Hannibal said, kissing his temple.

“Do you see any you think are worth keeping?” Will asked.

“It’s early yet, but a few show promise. If you and Abigail hadn’t killed Bedelia, we might even have found her a mate among this bunch.”

“Now, sweetheart, Jack didn’t want her as his mate, and how was I to know when the next shipwreck would be? After we finished eating her two sailors we didn’t have any fresh meat, and baby wendigos need real meat so they can grow big and strong and become apex predators like their daddy. They’re not going to get that way if their mommy is eating that four-footed meat substitute you’ve been catching scurrying around the jungle. Isn’t that right, my precious angel?” he said, baby-talking to his stomach and patting the side of it affectionately. “Your baby needs long-pig, not pig-pig.”

“Well, what about fish? You used to love fish.”

“I did, but I don’t seem to have a taste for it anymore. No, Bedelia died for the greater good,” he said, looking at his stomach affectionately. And Abigail agreed with me. Actually, so did Randall, come to think of it. He told me he never liked her to begin with.”

Hannibal shook his head. “I pity anyone who tries to get in between anything you two bloodthirsty vixens want,” he said affectionately. “I found it amusing when Jack refused my suggestion of Bedelia as his mate, stating that he wanted someone feistier, someone more like you.”

“That’s because the Captain has excellent taste. By the way, I think he might have found just the one. Have you seen the way he’s been watching Bella?”

“Which one is Bella again?”

“The one at dinner who insinuated that anyone who lives on an island and has a broken radio and a broken boat isn’t too bright.”

Hannibal laughed. “Ah, yes, I remember her now. If he’s looking for feisty, I’d say he’s hit the jackpot with that one. But if she is the one, I couldn’t be happier for him.”

“Well, as to thinning out the herd and ridding ourselves of the undesirables, I hope for our first culling you’re going to choose Mr. Purnell. He actually curled up his lip when you introduced me
as your mate. And his wife was just as bad, looking at me as if there was something smelly under her nose.”

“You should have seen Jack’s face when he saw that,” Hannibal said. “I thought the antlers were going to burst out then and there and he was going to go for their throats. I had to put my hand on his shoulder to calm him.”

Will laughed. “Well, our good captain has a soft spot for male omegas since we now know that his mother’s sister gave birth to one. He saw first-hand what his cousin went through.”

“I was actually thinking about hunting Mr. Purnell tonight; then Abigail can certainly have her kidney pie and we’ll have fresh meat to serve our guests. I promise he’ll die slowly, regretting his insult to you, my dearest. In fact, I’ll take Jack with me so he can help me dish out the man’s punishment for his unforgivably rude behavior. I was also thinking about leaving his wife chained to a wall in the basement for you and Abigail’s amusement. Dr. Chilton says the two of you are to avoid too much exertion now that you’re entering your third trimesters, so perhaps a little mild exertion is in order to keep you both amused.”

“Oh, you do spoil me so,” Will purred. “And maybe when I’m done with her I’ll paint my body with her blood and let you lick it off me,” he said in a sultry voice, looking up at his mate enticingly.”

“I could think of no finer feast,” Hannibal said, kissing him soundly; then nuzzling his neck and breathing in his scent, which was even sweeter now that he was pregnant.

“Tell me you’re not considering keeping Mr. Verger. Running a meatpacking dynasty it’s obvious he wouldn’t have an issue with the whole killing part of being a wendigo. I actually thought he was going to wet himself with excitement looking at the upstairs trophies. But something about that man really seems off and gives me the creeps. I do like his sister though. I get the feeling she would benefit greatly from a life away from her brother. And actually, come to think of it, Anthony Dimmond is an alpha and I think they would be good together,” he said thoughtfully.

“Matchmaking now, are we? Even if I wanted to keep Mason Verger, I wouldn’t. I’ve seen his eyes roaming over your body more than once with an almost sadistic gleam. The only reason I haven’t ripped out his throat already is because it would alarm the other sheep.”

“Well, maybe we should go ahead and invite Margot down to see the trophy room and bite her, and then in five days her brother could be her first hunt. Something tells me she might actually enjoy that.”

“We will decide Mason Verger’s fate eventually, but the Prurnells need to be taken care of first for their incredible slight against you, my darling.”

Will preened under his mate’s attention until he felt a wet nose trying to poke itself under his arm. “Winston! There you are! I bet you’ve been exploring the jungle with Peter,” Will said, petting the dog’s soft fur. “I’m so happy someone on that ship had a dog and that he managed to survive. I’ve always wanted a dog,” Will said, looking into Winston’s big brown eyes lovingly and ruffling his fur. “Oh, and I want to keep Peter as well.” At a disbelieving look from Hannibal Will said, “I know he’s a beta and he’s a little bit strange, but he’s a gentle soul and he makes me happy. I can tell he’ll be good with children, and with all the children that we’re anticipating in this household, we’ll need someone to help keep an eye on them when we’re all off hunting together. I can’t imagine Cordell or Abel being good babysitters.”

Hannibal sighed. “Fine. You know I can deny you nothing,” he said, kissing Will’s neck while
Will purred in contentment. Purring was a sound Will never even realized he could make until after he was mated. He felt an answering purring rumble against his back as Hannibal also expressed his happiness.

As Will leaned his head back on his mate’s shoulder feeling totally content, he thought about how strange life was. Back in the real world he was considered a freak, had to hide what he was, and had thought he was destined to live a loveless, childless life. But here on this island he felt beautiful, accepted and loved. Here he had a family, he had freedom, he had laughter and love—and soon he would have a child of his own. He had everything he thought he could never have. He knew they couldn’t stay here forever. Eventually someone would narrow down the area where the ships were disappearing and send people to investigate, maybe even send a navy ship. Hannibal told him when that day came they would deal with it while hopefully swelling their numbers, and then move everyone back to his ancestral lands in Lithuania. Will knew he would be happy being anywhere his mate was, but there was a part of him that would miss this island. He had never really lived before coming here. His whole adult life had been about surviving. He had simply existed one day at a time while constantly worrying if this would be the day that he somehow slipped up and was found out. No, although he hadn’t realized it at the time, his life hadn’t really begun until the day his ship sunk and he crawled to shore on this beautiful, wonderful island.

- The End -

Chapter End Notes

And so our story ends as it began: with a shipwreck. But, oh, what a difference six months has made! I hope you all enjoyed my island tale. I certainly enjoyed the amazing response to this story. I wasn’t expecting all the wonderful interaction through comments that I received, and I don’t mind telling you that I loved each and every one. And thank you to everyone who hit the kudo button. Every kudo was like a warm, fuzzy hug. If you enjoyed the story but haven’t commented or kudoed yet, it’s not too late! I would certainly love to hear from you. This is EvilAdmin, out!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!